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### **FACTORS THAT DIRECTLY INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO FORMAL ACTIONS BY TARGETS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

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### **Abstract**

We propose a conceptual model that explains differences in the perceptions of organizational responses to formal actions taken by targets of sexual harassment. Both military and public-sector samples are used to test a set of hypotheses related to the direct effects posited in the model. Results reveal that the direct effects associated with each of the model's three major factors explain a significant amount of the variance in target perceptions in both samples. An organizational characteristic, the number of organizational actions taken to prevent/deal with sexual harassment, explained the greatest amount of variance in target perceptions in both samples. Hypotheses related to the nexus of the sexually harassing experience and the number of formal actions taken by targets were also supported in both samples. Implications for sexual harassment related policies, procedures, and research are discussed.

**FACTORS THAT DIRECTLY INFLUENCE  
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FORMAL ACTIONS BY TARGETS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Through the cumulative efforts of researchers and practitioners over the last two decades, our understanding of sexual harassment (SH) in the workplace has grown substantially. However, despite these efforts SH remains a persistent, and often highly publicized, problem for organizations and their employees.

One area of enduring concern to both researchers and practitioners is how targets respond to SH. For example, targets report that taking formal action is the most effective way of dealing with workplace SH, and researchers concur. However, the results of surveys continue to show that few targets respond to SH with any kind formal action (e.g., Cochran, Frazier, & Olson, 1997; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; Gutek, 1993; Gwartney-Gibbs & Lach, 1992; Kremer & Marks, 1992; NCRW, 1991; USMSPB, 1995). This is in spite of the fact that organizations increasingly include formal and informal policies and procedures for reporting SH and outside agencies (e.g., the EEOC) continue to be a source of support.

A considerable amount of research has investigated this reluctance to take formal action. Targets report a variety of reasons for taking no formal action, including a sense of personal embarrassment, ignorance of what types of action can be taken, fear of retaliation or isolation, self-blame, a perception that their complaint will be taken lightly, fear that they will not be believed or that they will be considered a troublemaker, or a lack of confidence that the organization will respond at all (e.g., Collins & Blodgett, 1981; Dandekar, 1990; Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod & Weitzman, 1988; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Hotelling, 1991; Koss, 1990; Kremer & Marks, 1992; Meek & Lynch, 1983; Valentine-French & Radkte, 1989; USMSPB, 1981, 1988).

It is interesting to note that many of these reasons revolve around a fear of some type of negative response from the organization. Although we do not know the extent to which these fears reflect reality, their foundation is of great interest. For example, it is possible these fears are to some extent rooted in past experience, such as when targets perceive that their organization has responded negatively to those who have taken formal action. In support of this, we know that target perceptions of organizational responses to SH complaints directly affect the reporting behavior of members of each group (Brooks & Perot, 1991; Ellis, Barak, & Pinto, 1991). Also, bystander perceptions of SH incidents are influenced by the organizational responses they observe (Bond, 1990; Schneider, 1996), and the likelihood that bystanders will report future SH is influenced by past organizational responses to SH (Biaggio, Watts, & Brownell, 1990; Brandenburg, 1982; Remick, Salisbury, Stringer, & Ginorio, 1990). For example, individuals are more likely to report future harassment if they have observed their organizations taking constructive action against perpetrators in the past, but less likely if they have observed retaliation against targets.

Alternatively, these fears associated with formal action could be the result of target generalizations based on their perceptions of the organization's stance toward SH. That is, targets could make attributions based on their perceptions of whether or not organizational policies and practices communicate a tolerance for SH. For example, if they believe that organizational leaders tolerate SH, targets often conclude that reporting their harassment poses too great a personal risk (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Spann, 1990). Moreover, Brandenburg (1982) reports that target expectations about the efficacy of organizational policies affects whether targets report the event internally or elect to seek assistance outside the organization.

Finally, other research suggests there is a widespread belief among targets that organizational SH policies are just not effective (Benson & Thomson, 1982; Dandekar, 1990; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gruber, 1989; Gwartney-Gibbs & Lach, 1992; Koss, 1990; Kremer & Marks, 1992; Maypole and

Skaine, 1982; Meek & Lynch, 1983; Paludi, Grossman, Scott, Kinderman, Matula, Ostwald, Dovan, & Mulcahy, 1990; Rabinowitz, 1990; Robertson, Dyer, & Campbell, 1988; Rowe, 1981; Silverman, 1976-77; Sullivan & Bybee, 1987). This, too, could contribute to the fact that only a small percentage of targets undertake formal action.

This body of research points to the importance of target perceptions of organizational responses to formal actions they take as a result of being harassed. A better understanding of the factors that contribute to these positive and negative perceptions could be very valuable. For example, it could lead to the development of more effective SH policies and procedures as well as SH training programs, and these would likely better facilitate the reporting and resolution of SH complaints. Moreover, a better understanding of the factors associated with organizational responses to target formal actions would contribute to a more complete understanding of the nomological network within which SH exists.

Preliminary research by DuBois, Kustis, Faley & Knapp (in press) provides some insight about four variables that differentiate between target perceptions of favorable and unfavorable organizational responses to formal actions they take. These four variables include: number of organizational actions taken to deal with SH, occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target, frequency and duration of the harassment, and the number of formal actions taken by the target. However, the work of DuBois et al. was not framed within a larger conceptual model that would help researchers better understand the range of factors that affect target perceptions of how organizations respond to the formal actions targets take. As noted by any number of researchers, such a conceptual model does not exist (Fitzgerald, et al., 1995; Fitzgerald, Hulin & Drasgow, 1994; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & DuBois, 1997; Lengnick-Hall, 1995).

## **Purpose of the Current Paper**

The intent of this paper is fourfold: (1) to identify through an analysis of the existing literature the factors that most likely influence target perceptions of organizational responses to formal actions; (2) to propose a conceptual model that illustrates how these factors collectively influence organizational responses to the formal actions targets take; (3) to develop and test a set of hypotheses derived from the model in order to assess the theoretical fidelity of several of its components, and (4) to compare these results using two different populations.

This conceptual model provides a foundation upon which to explore, within a multivariate context, the influence of individual and contextual factors on organizational responses to formal target actions. In light of the results, recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of SH-related policies, practices, and remedial actions are discussed.

## **A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THOSE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATION RESPONSES TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

The conceptual model that follows includes those individual and organization-level factors that influence target perceptions of organizational responses to target formal actions. The boundary conditions of the model are derived not only from the SH literature but also from a closely related stream of research - the whistle-blowing literature.

### **Theoretical Bases of the Model: Sexual Harassment and Whistle-Blowing**

Whistle-blowing was defined by Near & Miceli (1985) as "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, and illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to affect action" (p.4). Knapp and her colleagues (1997) have argued that SH is a specific case of whistle-blowing. For example, SH targets who take formal actions are like whistle-blowers in that: (a) both are organization members, (b) who disclose illegal activities (e.g., corporate fraud or sexual harassment), (c) to a person (e.g., supervisor,

human resources, manager, organizational ombudsman) or organization (e.g., Department of Justice or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC]), (d) that is able to take action (e.g., investigate the complaint or demand that the behavior end).

In their model of whistle-blowing, Near and Miceli (1995) propose that both individual and organizational factors influence whistle-blowing effectiveness. Moreover, these authors argue that whistle-blowing effectiveness is measured by the extent the whistle-blowing helps end the wrongful behavior without repercussions to the whistle-blower.

In a similar manner, the literature on SH suggests that the effectiveness of organizational responses to SH complaints is influenced by individual as well as organizational factors, and that the goal of those who complain is to end the SH without personal repercussions (Bingham & Burleson, 1989; Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Gadlin, 1991; Popovich, 1988). Clearly, there is a conceptual link between the whistle-blowing and SH paradigms, and the boundary conditions associated with whistle-blowing could be used to help establish the boundary conditions associated with the nomological network surrounding SH.

One potentially meaningful difference between whistle-blowers and targets of SH is that whistle-blowers are usually bystanders while targets of SH are usually the direct recipients. Therefore, a whistle-blowing paradigm cannot be used to help model formal action taken by a target of SH with full fidelity except in those less common instances where formal actions are taken by third-party bystanders (e.g., see Drinkwater v. Union Carbide Corp., 1990 or Broderick v. Ruder, 1988).

Together, the information contained in the whistle-blowing and SH literatures provides a foundation upon which to develop a conceptual model that includes the major factors that influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions. The following is a description of such a model, and includes a set of hypotheses associated with those factors in the model that directly influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions.

## Model Description

The model illustrated in Figure 1 represents a conceptual integration of constructs found in the whistle-blowing and SH literatures. The model attempts to explain the favorability of target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions. Favorable organizational responses are likely to include those that result in effective action to correct the damage done to the target or organizational responses that result in swift and serious consequences for the perpetrator. Unfavorable organizational responses are likely to include those that result in retaliation against the target or where the organization does nothing in response to the target's actions.

In brief, the model posits that three primary factors directly influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions: (a) the characteristics of the organization; (b) the nexus of the sexually harassing experience (including perpetrator, target, and situational characteristics); and (c) the formal action(s) taken by the target. We argue that each of these factors adds significant incremental variance to the explanation of target perceptions of organizational responses to the actions targets take.

The model also posits that the first two factors indirectly influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions through their influence on other factors. As such, organizational characteristics indirectly influence target perceptions through their impact on the nexus of the sexually harassing experience. Moreover, the nexus of the sexually harassing experience indirectly influences target perceptions through its impact on the formal action(s) taken by targets.

For example, we would argue that the extent to which an organization's climate tolerates SH directly influences the characteristics of the sexually harassing experience, including the type(s) of harassment that occurred, the frequency and duration of the harassment, and whether supervisors or coworkers (or both) were involved. In turn, the characteristics of the sexually harassing experience,

including the age and status of the target relative to the perpetrator, would influence the number of formal actions taken by the target.

Finally, the model posits that target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will influence the characteristics of the organization. For example, organizations that respond to targets in ways that are perceived as unfavorable (e.g., by retaliating against targets) are more likely to create climates that have a “chilling effect” on the actions of future targets. More harassment is likely to occur in these organizations, and the “face” of the harassment that occurs is likely to be shaped by this and other organizational characteristics.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **HYPOTHESES BASED ON THE MODEL**

As noted above, the hypotheses offered and tested in the current study are those that correspond to the direct paths in the model. Thus, the discussion that follows is limited to hypotheses associated with those factors in the model that directly influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions.

#### **Organizational Characteristics**

The first major factor illustrated in Figure 1 that directly influences target perceptions focuses on the characteristics of the organization. For example, research that has examined the relationship between organizational climate and the frequency and/or severity of SH suggests that organizations with climates that encourage social-sexual behaviors experience greater amounts of the more severe types of SH (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Ellis, et al., 1991; Fitzgerald et al., 1994; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990; Hair, 1987; Lafontaine & Tredeau, 1986; Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993; Vaux, 1993). Correspondingly, organizational characteristics should have an impact on how the organization responds to incidents of SH, and how employees

perceive the organization's response.

Recent work by Fitzgerald and colleagues (Fitzgerald, et al., 1997; Fitzgerald, et al., 1994; Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996) has highlighted the importance of organizational climate, or tolerance of SH, and job gender context as antecedents of SH. Therefore, we represent organizational characteristics in our model with two variables: organizational actions taken to prevent SH (as a reflection of organizational tolerance of SH) and the gender composition of the target's work group.

### **Organizational Actions Taken to Prevent/Diminish SH**

Researchers and practitioners have repeatedly recommended that organizations implement a myriad of formal and informal actions to discourage workplace SH (e.g., Grundmann, O'Donohue, & Peterson, 1997; Gutek, 1997). Additionally, Researchers and practitioners suggest that this myriad of well-communicated organizational actions can influence the ways targets deal with SH. For example, Gruber (1989) and Gwartney-Gibbs & Lach (1992) report that targets in organizations where few actions are taken to discourage SH are much less likely to report being sexually harassed. Moreover, organizations that offer targets an array of informal as well as formal policies and procedures for dealing with SH complaints report higher levels of reporting behavior among targets (Biaggio et al., 1990; Gadlin, 1991; Lach & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1993; McKinney, Olson & Satterfield, 1988; Rowe, 1996).

Fitzgerald & Shullman (1993), Popovich (1988), and Spann (1990) also report that organizations with leaders who don't view SH as a serious workplace issue are less likely to respond favorably to target complaints of SH. As noted by Gutek (1985), this sensibility is likely to resonate throughout the organization and have a negative impact on the organization's SH-related climate. Finally, Livingston (1982) reports that whether targets use the organizational actions that are available depends to some extent on how well they are communicated to employees.

Overall, employees look to the actions taken by their organization to prevent/diminish SH to

determine whether or not SH is tolerated, and for guidance regarding target reactions that the organization will deem appropriate when SH does occur. Therefore, we propose the following:

*H1: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be more favorable as the number of organizational actions to prevent/diminish SH increases.*

### **Gender Composition of the Target's Work Group**

Research suggests that the gender composition of an individual's work group is associated with the frequency and duration of sexually harassing events. These studies indicate that individuals in gender-skewed workplaces are more likely to experience SH (Ellis et al., 1991; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Gutek, 1985; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Gutek et al., 1990; Sandroff, 1988; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982). Conversely, workplaces that are sexually integrated exhibit lower levels of SH (Gutek, 1985; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Tangri et al., 1982).

Workplaces with a high male-to-female ratio are especially likely to have a sexually hostile work environment in which SH goes underreported (Gutek, 1985; Gutek et al., 1990; O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982). For example, women in male-dominated work groups are less likely to report SH because they believe they will not receive support from their coworkers (Fain & Anderton, 1987). This problem may be further exacerbated when the females are also minorities (Kanter, 1977).

The impact of work-group gender composition on perceptions of organizational responses to target formal actions has not been directly examined. However, recent research (Burgess & Borgida, 1997) reported that sexual coercion, the behavior that men and women alike are most inclined to label as SH, was perceived as less coercive or threatening when targets were females who worked in nontraditional occupations. Because women in nontraditional occupations are usually in gender-skewed work groups, this suggests that gender composition of the work group can have a negative impact on how the SH is perceived, and thereby responded to. Additionally, given that gender-skewed work groups are more likely to have sexually hostile work environments, and given that such

environments are likely to discourage reporting behavior, we propose the following:

*H2: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be less favorable as the composition of the target's work group becomes more gender skewed.*

### **Nexus of the Sexual Harassment Experience**

The second of the three factors in Figure 1 that directly influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions focuses on the nexus of the SH experience. By “nexus of the SH experience” we mean the constellation of factors that define the nature of the sexually harassing experience. Thus, we agree with those researchers who have argued that the multidimensional nature of SH suggests it is more a process than an event, and that treating SH as an event is a very misleading over-simplification (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Knapp et al., 1997; Pryor, 1987). For example, this over-simplification has fostered research that focuses on the impact of target characteristics without also considering the dynamics of the sexually harassing situation (e.g., Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Barak, Fisher, & Houston, 1992; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Jones & Remland, 1992; Roth & Fedor, 1993; Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1987).

Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) argue that any operationalization of SH must invariably include the characteristics of both the target and the sexually harassing situation. We suggest that this operationalization should be further expanded to include the characteristics of the perpetrator. Therefore, we propose here that the nexus of the sexually harassing experience should include at least the following three elements: target characteristics, perpetrator characteristics, and characteristics of the sexually harassing situation. Each of these elements is described in the following section.

#### **Target Characteristics**

Any number of target characteristics might contribute to the nexus of the sexual harassment targets experience. As illustrated in the model, this nexus directly influences both the extent of the formal action taken by targets and the perceptions targets have of the organization's response to their

formal actions. We focus specifically on the target's age and the occupational status of the target relative to the perpetrator.

**Age of the target.** Both the SH (Roth & Fedor, 1993; Terpstra & Cook, 1985) and the whistle-blowing (Parmerlee, Near, & Jensen 1982) literatures report that younger workers are more likely to take formal action. The SH literature also suggests that older, more senior, female targets are more likely to expect negative outcomes if they report a sexually harassing experience (Barak, et al., 1992). The relationship between age and the likelihood of taking formal actions may be partially related to cultural stereotypes that associate youth with sexual attractiveness. In effect, organizations may take more seriously formal actions from younger targets because of stereotypical notions that perpetrators prefer younger targets.

Thus, we suggest that younger targets are more likely to have expectations that organizational responses to their formal actions will be favorable. That is, younger targets are more likely to believe that their formal actions will be deemed more plausible (and hence, more supportable) than formal actions taken by older workers. Given this, we propose the following:

*H3: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be more favorable as target age decreases.*

**Occupational status of the target.** The small amount of research that focuses on the occupational status of the target suggests that targets with higher occupational status are more likely to file a formal complaint or take other formal action (Cochran, et al., 1997). Moreover, Gruber & Bjorn (1986) report there are differences in SH-related coping strategies between women targets in low- and high-skilled jobs: women in low-skilled jobs are more likely to respond non-assertively.

Similarly, Miceli and Near (1988) report that whistle-blowing is positively related to the occupational status of the whistle-blower. These authors note that employees with greater occupational status are in a better position to bring about change and avoid retaliation because their status helps

protect them and increases the likelihood their actions will be taken seriously. Thus, we propose the following:

*H4: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be more favorable as the occupational status of the target increases.*

### **Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment**

As noted above, perpetrator characteristics will also directly influence target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions. Although many perpetrator characteristics have been examined, none so far has proven more important than the occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target.

**Occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target.** As noted earlier, the whistle-blowing literature strongly suggests that employees with higher occupational status are more likely to be whistle-blowers (Miceli & Near, 1988). Similarly, some SH research also suggests that the occupational status of the perpetrator has an impact on organizational responses to SH. For example, Gutek (1993) notes that when the perpetrator is a company executive, the company is more likely to “circle the wagons” and defend the more powerful individual in an effort to either protect the company’s executives and/or the company’s reputation.

However, while the whistle-blowing literature has focused more on the impact of absolute occupational level on whistle-blowing behavior, the SH literature has focused more on the impact of occupational differentials on target behavior. For example, a number of authors have reported that if the perpetrator of the SH is the target's superior, the target is much less likely to report the incident (Cochran, et al., 1997; Gadlin, 1991; Gutek, 1993; Hotelling, 1991; Littler-Bishop, Seidler-Feller, & Opaluch, 1982). Thacker (1991) suggests this may occur primarily because these targets fear the retaliatory power of higher-level perpetrators. Interestingly, Livingston (1982) reports that the most aggressive target actions (e.g., filing a formal complaint against the perpetrator) were increasingly less

effective as the job status of the perpetrator relative to the target increased. Therefore, we propose the following:

*H5: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be less favorable as the occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target increases.*

### **Characteristics of the Sexually Harassing Situation**

The final component of the nexus of the sexually harassing experience is the characteristics of the sexually harassing situation. Specifically, we focus on the frequency, duration, and severity of the sexually harassing behavior(s) that are part of the harassing experience.

**Frequency and duration of the SH.** The number of sexually harassing incidents associated with a sexual harassment experience is a function of the frequency and duration of the harassment. A number of studies have reported that the number of harassing incidents associated with a sexually harassing experience influences the propensity of targets to take formal action (Brooks & Perot, 1991; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Jones & Remland, 1992; Livingston, 1982; Sullivan & Bybee, 1987; Terpstra, 1986; Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1987). For example, these studies consistently indicate that targets are more likely to take formal action as the number of harassing incidents increases.

As the number of incidents a target is subjected to as part of a SH experience increases, the likelihood that others will both witness the sexually harassing behaviors involved and perceive them as inappropriate also increases. Similarly, as the number of incidents associated with a complaint increases so does the likelihood the organization will recognize the legitimacy of the complaint. This likely will influence employee perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions (Biaggio et al., 1990; Brandenburg, 1982; Gutek, 1993; Kremer & Marks; 1992; Remick et al., 1990; Sullivan & Bybee, 1987). Therefore, we propose the following:

*H6: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be more favorable as the number of sexually harassing incidents experienced by the target increases.*

**Severity of the SH.** A number of studies have also found that SH severity is positively related to the reporting of SH (Brooks & Perot, 1991; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Jones & Remland, 1992; Livingston, 1982; Sullivan & Bybee, 1987; Terpstra, 1986; Terpstra & Cook, 1985). Most of these studies use as a proxy for severity some measure related to the type of sexually harassing behavior experienced. For example, Till's (1980) five-level typology is widely used to categorize sexually harassing behaviors along a severity continuum, and has received partial empirical support (Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Till's typology includes: (a) gender harassment - sexist remarks and comments; (b) seductive behavior - inappropriate, offensive but sanction-free sexual advances; (c) sexual bribery - solicitation of sexual activity in exchange for rewards; (d) sexual coercion - coercion of sexual activity through the use of threats or punishment; and (e) sexual assault - gross sexual imposition or assault.

Additionally, the likelihood that an incident will be perceived as sexually harassing by the target, bystanders, and/or those to whom the incident is reported is related to the severity of the sexual behaviors displayed during that incident (Baker, Terpstra, & Cutler, 1990; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991; Littler-Bishop et al., 1982). Further, even though men and women differently perceive incidents of unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment, both men and women similarly perceive incidents of sexual coercion as SH (Burgess & Borgida, 1997; Frazier, Cochran, & Olson, 1995; Gutek & O'Connor, 1995). Thus, the likelihood that organizations will respond well to formal action taken by a target of SH increases as the severity of the sexual behaviors associated with the action taken increases. For example, harassment that includes sexual assault or rape will very likely invoke a response even in organizations with a climate that tolerates others types of harassment. Therefore, we propose the following:

*H7: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be more favorable as the severity of the SH a target experiences increases.*

### **Formal Actions Taken by the Target**

The third major factor in Figure 1 focuses on the influence of the formal actions taken by targets on their perceptions of organizational responses. Targets may take a variety of formal actions including, among others, reporting the behavior to a superior, requesting an investigation by the organization, and filing a lawsuit. The number of formal actions taken depends on any number of factors, especially the target's satisfaction with how the organization has responded to earlier actions. For example, a target is likely to resort to legal action only after the organization's failure to satisfactorily respond to repeated requests for other types of formal action.

Research by Knapp et al. (1997) addresses the factors that influence the sequence of informal and formal actions targets take. These authors propose that target coping strategies vary as a function of both the focus and mode of the target's response. That is, targets respond to the harassment either by using a self or supported response mode that focuses either on themselves or the perpetrator. Knapp et al. and other researchers (e.g., Gruber, 1989; Gutek & Koss, 1993) suggest that targets typically employ an escalating sequence of coping strategies, starting with a strategy that involves any number of informal actions and ending with a strategy that involves any number of formal actions.

Unfortunately, relatively little research exists regarding the relationship between the extent of formal action taken by targets and organizational responses. However, studies have concluded that targets who take formal action frequently face retaliation from their organizations (Crull, 1982; DiTomaso, 1989; Dunwoody-Miller & Gutek, 1985; Gutek, 1993; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Terpstra & Cook, 1985). This suggests that targets who adopt a strategy that involves formal actions are more likely to encounter an unfavorable response from the organization. The unfavorable nature of the organization's response could intensify as the number of formal actions taken by the target increases. One potential indicator of this is the fact noted earlier that targets very rarely use a coping strategy that involves formal actions even though they report it is the most effective strategy. Therefore, we

propose the following:

*H8: Target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions will be less favorable as the number of formal actions taken by targets increases.*

## METHODS

Two large archival data sets were analyzed separately to test the hypotheses noted above derived based on the conceptual model presented in Figure 1. The first data set involved a military work force and the second a public-sector work force.

### STUDY 1: MILITARY WORK FORCE

#### Military Sample

The data for Study 1 came from the 1995 Department of Defense Survey of Sex Roles in the Active-Duty Military (DMDC, 1996), a sample of active-duty military personnel stratified based on service branch, gender, officer-enlisted status, and race. Oversampling of females, minorities, officers, and service branches (other than the Army) was performed to ensure sufficient statistical power to conduct sub-group analyses. Study 1 uses data from Form A of the survey because Form A is very similar to the survey instrument used in Study 2. Form A was mailed to 30,756 personnel in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, and had a response rate of 46% ( $n = 13,599$ ). Fifty-five percent of all female and 14 percent of all male respondents reported they experienced sexual harassing behaviors during the one-year period prior to the survey.

For the purposes of the present study, we included only respondents who reported: a) they had been harassed at work during the twelve months prior to completing the survey, b) they took formal action regarding the SH, and c) how the organization responded to the formal action(s) they took. This resulted in a sample size of 484.

Respondents were asked if they had experienced "... sexual attention that was unwanted and uninvited from someone at work while in the active-duty military" in the twelve months prior to

answering the survey (DMDC, 1996, Appendix A, p.49). Because subjects were asked about the specific types of unwanted sexual behavior they had experienced, the problems associated with individual perceptions of what constitutes SH were avoided (see Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993).

## **Variables**

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable was the perceived favorability of the organization's response to the targets formal action(s), which was coded from 1 (least favorable) to 6 (most favorable). Appendix A contains the responses and coding scheme used in Study 1. Respondents who reported "I don't know whether anyone did anything" or "the action is still being processed" were not included in the analyses.

**Independent variables.** Independent variables related to each of the three factors included in the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1 are described below.

*Organizational Characteristics: Organizational actions taken.* This score reflects the total number of different actions respondents reported that their organization had taken in an effort to prevent/reduce workplace SH. Values for the organizational-action score for Study 1 data ranged from 1 to 10. These actions included, among others, enforcing penalties against perpetrators, providing awareness training for various personnel, and publicizing the availability of formal complaint channels (Appendix A contains a complete list of reported actions.)

*Organizational Characteristics: Work group composition.* This variable represented the gender skewness of the target's work group. Values ranged from 1 (balanced) to 3 (dominated by one gender).

*SH Nexus – Target Characteristics: Age of the target.* The age of the target came from the target's personnel file.

*SH Nexus – Target Characteristics: Target job status.* The job status of the target came from the target's personnel file. Values ranged from 1 to 4, with values 1-3 representing enlisted personnel and value 4 representing officers.

*SH Nexus – Perpetrator Characteristics: Relative occupational status of the perpetrator.* This variable represented the occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target. Variable values ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high): other or unknown = 1; subordinate(s) = 2; co-worker(s) = 3; immediate supervisor = 4; unit commander or other higher-level military personnel = 5.

*SH Nexus – SH Characteristics: Frequency and duration of the harassment.* The frequency/duration of the harassment was represented by the number of harassing incidents the target experienced over the duration of the harassment (range = 1 - 180).

*SH Nexus – SH Characteristics: Severity of harassment.* Targets used a checklist to report the various types of sexually harassing behaviors they experienced. These behaviors ranged from hoots and catcalls to actual or attempted rape. For the purposes of Study 1, the severity of the sexually harassing behaviors experienced by targets ranged from 1 (least severe) to 4 (most severe) based on the underlying metric suggested by Till's (1980) taxonomy of sexually harassing behaviors (see also Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Fitzgerald, et al., 1988). Appendix A contains a list of the behaviors and their corresponding values.

*Formal Action: Extent of formal action taken by the target.* Targets were asked to identify the formal action(s) they took to remedy the SH they experienced. An "extent of formal action" score was derived by summing the total number of formal actions taken (scores ranged from 1 to 8). A list of the formal actions taken is presented in Appendix A.

### **Missing Data**

As recommended by Roth (1994), listwise deletion of cases with missing data was not employed. Rather, mean values were substituted for missing values for a small number of cases. Specifically, mean value substitution was used for four of the nine variables in the study, and the number of cases in which means were substituted ranged from four to eleven across the four variables. Mean values were not substituted for more than two variables for any case.

## Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine whether the Study 1 data supported the hypotheses related to the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1. Variables were entered in three steps, representing the three factors in this model. Because the factor associated with the number of formal actions taken by the target does not have an indirect effect on target perceptions of organizational responses, it was entered first. The second step of the regression included all variables associated with the nexus of the sexually harassing experience: perpetrator characteristics (perpetrator job status), target characteristics (target job-status and age), and characteristics of the sexually harassing behavior (frequency/duration and severity). The third step included the organizational characteristics variables (organizational actions taken and work group composition).

The robustness of the direct effects of the overall three-factor model was determined by examining the significance of the incremental variance explained at each step of the regression. Individual hypotheses were tested by examining the significance of the standardized coefficients associated with each relevant variable.

## Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations associated with all study variables are reported in Table 1. Results of the hierarchical regression are reported in Table 2. The adjusted R Square associated with the full model is .15. The incremental variance explained by each step of the regression was significant ( $F = 19.7, 6.1, \text{ and } 20.1$ , respectively, all  $p < .001$ ). Thus, for Study 1 targets, each major factor in the model significantly contributes to an understanding of target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions.

The standardized coefficients associated with four of the eight independent variables were significant at the  $p < .05$  level. These four variables were: organizational actions taken ( $p < .001$ ), target age ( $p < .05$ ), perpetrator/target status ( $p < .01$ ), and target formal actions taken ( $p < .001$ ). The

coefficient associated with the harassment-severity variable was significant at the  $p < .1$  level. These findings support hypotheses 1, 3, 5, 8, and 7 respectively.

## STUDY 2: PUBLIC-SECTOR WORK FORCE

### Public-Sector Sample

The data for Study 2 came from the 1994 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board Survey of Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace (USMSPB, 1995). This survey was sent to a representative cross-section of approximately 13,200 Federal employees across the U.S, and had a response rate was 61% ( $n =$  approximately 8,000). Forty-four percent of all female and 19 percent of all male respondents reported they experienced sexual harassing behaviors during the two-year period prior to the survey.

For the purposes of the present study, we included only respondents who reported: a) they had been harassed at work during the twenty-four months prior to completing the survey, b) they took formal action regarding the SH, and c) how the organization responded to their formal action(s). This resulted in a sample size of 92.

Similar to Study 1 respondents, Study 2 respondents were asked if they had received "...uninvited and unwanted sexual attention during the past 24 months from someone where you work(ed) in the Federal Government?" (USMSPB, 1995, Appendix 1, p.61). Because subjects were asked about the specific types of unwanted sexual behavior they had experienced and were not asked if they had been sexually harassed, the problems associated with different individual perceptions of what constitutes SH were avoided.

### Variables

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable was the perceived favorability of the organization's response to target formal actions, which was coded from 1 (least favorable) to 6 (most favorable). Appendix B contains the responses and coding scheme used in Study 2. Respondents who reported "I don't know whether anyone did anything" or "the action is still being processed" were not included in the analyses.

**Independent variables.** Independent variables related to each of the three factors included in the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1 are described below.

*Organizational Characteristics: Organizational actions taken.* This score reflects the extent to which the respondent's agency made efforts to prevent/reduce workplace SH. Values ranged from 1 (to no extent) to 4 (to a great extent).

*Organizational Characteristics: Work group composition.* This variable represented the gender skewness of the target's work group. Values ranged from 1 (balanced) to 3 (dominated by one gender).

*SH Nexus – Target Characteristics: Age of the target.* Respondents were asked to identify their age by selecting one of the following categories: 16-19 (coded as 1); 20-24 (coded as 2); 25-34 (coded as 3); 35-44 (coded as 4); 45-54 (coded as 5); 55 or older (coded as 6).

*SH Nexus – Target Characteristics: Target job status.* Values ranged from 1 (lower) to 5 (higher) status: trainee (coded as 1); blue collar/service (coded as 2); office/clerical/technician (coded as 3); professional/scientific (coded as 4); and administrative/management (coded as 5).

*SH Nexus – Perpetrator Characteristics: Relative occupational status of the perpetrator.* This variable represented the occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target. The relative status of the perpetrator ranged from 1 (lower) to 5 (higher): other or unknown (coded as 1); subordinate(s) (coded as 2); co-worker(s) (coded as 3); immediate supervisor (coded as 4); higher level supervisor (coded as 5).

*SH Nexus – SH Characteristics: Frequency and duration of harassment.* The frequency/duration of harassment was represented by the number of harassing incidents the target experienced over the duration of the harassment (range = 1 - 180).

*SH Nexus – SH Characteristics: Severity of harassment.* Targets used a checklist to report the various types of sexually harassing behaviors they experienced. These behaviors ranged from hoots and catcalls to actual or attempted rape. For the purposes of Study 2, the severity of the sexually

harassing behaviors experienced by targets ranged from 1 (least severe) to 4 (most severe) based on the underlying metric suggested by Till's (1980) taxonomy of sexually harassing behaviors (see also Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Fitzgerald, et al., 1988). Appendix B contains a list of the behaviors and their corresponding values.

*Formal Action: Extent of formal action taken by the target.* Targets were asked to identify the formal action(s) they took to remedy the SH they experienced. An "extent of formal action" score was derived by summing the total number of formal actions taken (scores ranged from 1 to 5). A list of the formal actions taken is presented in Appendix B.

### **Missing Data**

Again, as recommended by Roth (1994), listwise deletion of cases with missing data was not employed. Rather, mean values were substituted for missing values for a small number of cases. Specifically, mean value substitution was used for seven of the nine variables in the study, and the number of cases in which means were substituted ranged from three to seven across the seven variables. Mean values were not substituted for more than two variables for any case.

## **Analysis**

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine whether the Study 2 data supported the hypotheses related to the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1. Variables were entered in three steps, representing the three factors in this model. Because the factor associated with the number of formal actions taken by the target does not have an indirect effect on target perceptions of organizational responses, it was entered first. The second step of the regression included all variables associated with the nexus of the sexually harassing experience: perpetrator characteristics (perpetrator job status), target characteristics (target job-status and age), and characteristics of the sexually harassing behavior (frequency/duration and severity). The third step included the organizational characteristics variables (organizational actions taken and work group composition).

The robustness of the direct effects of the overall three-factor model was determined by examining the significance of the incremental variance explained at each step of the regression. Individual hypotheses were tested by examining the significance of the standardized coefficients associated with each relevant variable.

## **Results**

The means, standard deviations, and correlations associated with all study variables are reported in Table 3. Results of the hierarchical regression are reported in Table 4. The adjusted R Square associated with the full model is .32. The incremental variance explained by each step of the regression was significant ( $F = 17.2, p < .001$ ;  $4.3, p < .01$ ; and  $3.5, p < .05$ , respectively). Thus, for Study 2 targets, each major factor in the model significantly contributes to an understanding of target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions.

The standardized regression coefficients associated with five of the eight independent variables were significant: organizational actions taken ( $p < .05$ ), target age ( $p < .05$ ), perpetrator/target status ( $p < .05$ ), SH severity ( $p < .05$ ), and target formal actions taken ( $p < .05$ ). These findings support

hypotheses 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8, respectively.

### **Discussion**

The current study had two major purposes. The first was to propose and test components of a conceptual model of factors associated with target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions. The second major purpose was to compare the results using independent data sets from two different populations (military and public-sector). The results reported for both populations were remarkably similar and provide strong support for the model. Overall, the analyses associated with both data sets show that each of the model's three major factors independently explains significant amounts of variance in target perceptions of organizational responses to their formal actions.

The results reported for both data sets also show that five of the eight independent variables examined had a significant direct effect on target perceptions. These variables included the extent to which organizations take actions to reduce/prevent workplace SH, target age, the occupational status of the perpetrator relative to the target, the severity of the sexually harassing behaviors, and the number of formal actions targets take as a response to the harassment they experience. The effects associated with these five variables were in the directions hypothesized.

On the other hand, the amount of variance explained by the eight independent variables was twice as large for the public-sector data set. This suggests either that the model better fits the public-sector SH experience or that additional variables representing the model's three major components need to be included before a similar fit to the military SH experience is possible. Due to the comparative use of the two data sets, analyses in the current study were limited to only those variables that were available in both data sets.

The lack of support for the hypotheses related to target status, work group composition, and frequency/duration of the harassment could be the result of any number of reasons. First, there is a dearth of literature about the relationship between target status and important outcome variables, and

none that directly focuses on target perceptions. Although the high correlation between target age and target status could be used to explain the lack of a relationship in Study 1, this is not the case in Study 2 where these variables are not correlated. Thus, based on our findings, it appears that target status does not directly influence target perceptions. The literature on work group composition and frequency/duration is much more extensive and suggests a relationship with target perceptions that was not supported by the findings reported above.

One possible reason for the lack of support for these two variables is that they have proven to be especially difficult to operationalize. The SH literature evidences a host of different ways in which these two variables are measured. For example, work group composition is sometimes operationalized to take into account target gender. This was not the case in the current study. In the case of the frequency/duration variable, it seems there is as many operationalizations as there are studies, which strongly suggests that we do not yet know how to properly measure these variables. As noted by Faley, Knapp, DuBois & Kustis (1997), frequency and duration are very likely dimensions of SH severity, which is consistent with the evolving evidence that SH is a process rather than an event.

One final explanation for the lack of support for these three variables is that all three may have significant indirect effects on target perceptions of organizational responses. Because we believed it was more important to test the robustness of our model using different populations, we were not able to test all the model's paths. This can be dealt with in future research.

Nonetheless, it is encouraging that in both populations the pattern of the overall results for the *nexus of the sexual harassment experience* supports the notion that SH is more likely a process than an event. The results for both populations show that a combination of target, perpetrator, and situational characteristics better represent the SH experience than any one characteristic alone.

In both populations the variable with the highest beta weight was the extent of the organizational actions taken to prevent/deal with SH. This finding is consistent with results previously

reported by DuBois et al. (in press). As noted by DuBois et al., organizations that demonstrate an intolerance for SH by implementing a myriad of preventive/remedial measures are more likely to be perceived by targets as supportive. This increases both the likelihood that targets will take advantage of their organization's complaint process and that organizations will have the opportunity to take prompt, remedial action. As noted by the Supreme Court in Burlington Industries v. Ellerth (1998) and Faragher v. City of Boca Raton (1998), organizations that provide a number of reasonable ways for targets to promptly deal with workplace SH can better defend themselves against SH lawsuits. The Court stated that employers can mitigate their liability for environmental SH if they can prove they implemented policies, procedures, and practices to prevent and promptly correct SH, and that targets unreasonably failed to take advantage of these policies, procedures, and practices.

The findings reported above with respect to the variables that represent the *nexus of the sexual harassment experience* (perpetrator status relative to the target, target age, and harassment severity) reiterate the importance of power issues and bystander perceptions of SH. As mentioned above, these variables influence the likelihood that the organization as well as other employees will perceive a situation as sexually harassing. Thus, variables that influence these perceptions are likely to influence both the future reporting behavior of targets as well as the type, substance, and supportiveness of the organization's response.

However, it would be unwise for organizations to respond inconsistently to formal actions taken by targets of SH, particularly if the response differences are based upon variations in the elements that comprise the nexus of the sexually harassing experience. For example, it would be unwise for organizations to respond more aggressively to complaints that involve supervisors or younger targets and less aggressively to complaints that involve coworkers or older targets. Organizations that place less emphasis on coworker complaints because they believe coworkers cannot have the same impact as supervisors or because the complaints of younger workers are more believable, ignore the facts that

coworkers exert significant influence over each other and that the majority of SH is motivated by power rather than sexual attraction (Bond, 1995; Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). As noted by the Supreme Court, coworkers who engage in less severe types of SH can create a hostile work environment that is every bit as devastating as supervisors who sexually assault a subordinate (Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 1993).

Finally, the finding reported above that targets who take a greater number of formal actions are less likely to perceive organizational responses as favorable is also consistent with the results reported by DuBois et al. (in press). There are several possible explanations for this. One explanation is that organizations that tolerate SH are less likely to welcome a formal complaint and even less likely to welcome additional formal target actions. Another possible explanation is that a “complaint threshold” exists in organizations, and if it is crossed the complaint process backfires on targets regardless of the organization’s tolerance. For example, organizations might very actively encourage less public types of formal action (e.g., reporting the SH to a supervisor or requesting an investigation), but very much resent the negative publicity that results from an EEOC complaint or lawsuit.

A third explanation is that at least some targets who take a greater number of formal actions might simply be difficult employees with very weak complaints. Such targets are unlikely to perceive any response from their organization as favorable or supportive. Regardless of the explanation, understanding why targets who take a greater number of formal actions perceive organizational responses as less favorable certainly merits further research. This would better clarify, for example, when targets will be at risk if they choose to escalate the number of formal actions they take to deal with a complaint.

### **Limitations**

Although the results of the two studies reported here are compelling, the studies have several potential limitations. The first limitation deals with the generalizability of the results reported above. Because Study 1 used a military data set and Study 2 used a public sector data set, it may be somewhat premature to generalize these findings to the private-sector work force. Therefore, future research

should attempt to test the fidelity of the model using one or more private-sector data sets.

Second, the data is survey data. As is the case with most all survey data, survey responses cannot be independently corroborated. However, we would argue that surveys are the only likely source of data about workplace SH and that employee perceptions are themselves worthy of scrutiny. This is especially the case in light of the fact that the conceptual model posits that target perceptions directly influence organizational characteristics which themselves have a direct influence on the nexus of the SH and an indirect influence on the formal actions targets take. As such, an understanding of those factors that influence target perceptions is important to understanding organizational responses, the nexus of the sexually harassing experience, and future target actions.

However, it is also possible that respondents with claims found to be false have biased or clouded perceptions of organizational responses. This is especially the case for targets who believed they had meritorious cases but simply lacked substantive evidence. Clearly, additional research using more objective data could shed some light on these thorny situations. However, as alluded to above, the challenges involved in collecting such data are enormous.

Finally, the analyses presented here tested only parts of the conceptual model in Figure 1. A causal analysis involving all direct and indirect relationships is necessary to fully establish the model's validity. Causal analyses were not performed here because the sample size in the public-sector data set was insufficient to support the number of paths and variables in the model. Therefore, the authors decided that the more compelling contribution to the SH literature would be the comparative analysis of the model's direct effects offered here. A full test of the model can be addressed by future research.

### **Implications**

The results of both studies presented here have several significant implications for organizations. The most notable implication from the results reported above is the importance of pursuing a host of organizational actions to prevent and deal with workplace SH. This is especially important in light of the implications for employers of the two 1998 Supreme Court decisions cited above. That is, organizations that actively pursue a myriad of formal and informal procedures to prevent and promptly remedy SH will be in the best position to affirmatively respond to lawsuits (see also Conte, 1997). Even more so, the results reported above suggest that organizations that more aggressively deal with SH are less likely to become involved in lawsuits in the first place.

As noted by Gutek (1997), informal and formal procedures often have different goals that serve well both employee and employer interests. For example, informal procedures are more likely to focus on stopping the harassment rather than determining culpability or intent, and might involve among others an apology or voluntary resignation, or a transfer of one or both parties. As such, organizations that make available a host of informal procedures are more likely to better deal with harassment in a less intimidating, less confrontational, and especially less public way. This is likely to appeal to a wider range of employees, especially those who rightly or wrongly fear some level of personal risk if they were to complain. Thus, including informal procedures as part of the organization's SH policy facilitates both the reporting and resolution of SH complaints.

Grundmann, et al. (1997) recommend an admixture of formal and informal organizational actions to support three levels of SH prevention. *Primary prevention* deters the occurrence of new SH by targeting a range of potential causal factors; *secondary prevention* minimizes the impact of existing problems by identifying and targeting existing causal factors; and *tertiary prevention* decreases the likelihood of recurring future problems by implementing remedial activities that, for example, focus on changing the behavior of known perpetrators. Bond (1995) recommends that organizations also implement a range of activities that foster a climate of employee empowerment. Although many of the activities Bond suggests (e.g., providing support for diversity and reducing the salience of gender) do not address SH directly, they are very likely to lead to an organizational climate much less tolerant of SH. Finally, Rowe (1996) suggests that organizations simultaneously provide an array of centralized and decentralized formal (grievance, investigation, etc.) and informal (mediated meeting, letter, etc.) resolution-related options. As noted by Rowe, in many cases decentralized, informal options are the only (or best) solutions for both the organization and the employee, and in some cases the only way for the organization to keep the remedy in-house.

Pierce, Smolinski, and Rosen (1998) suggest a number of similar recommendations to deal with what they call the “deaf ear syndrome,” which is the persistent propensity of organizations to fail to respond to SH complaints. These authors note the high costs of organizational inaction, and identify a number of factors that contribute to it, including poorly written/communicated SH policies, cumbersome SH reporting procedures, denial of SH claims, and not taking SH offenses seriously. These authors recommend that organizations increase management support, education, and vigilance to protect against the deaf ear syndrome. They also recommend periodic reviews of SH policies, acting immediately on SH complaints, creating a state of the art SH policy, and establishing a set of very clear reporting procedures.

In essence, an organization that acts proactively with a myriad of options sends a powerful message of zero tolerance to its employees. This will have a “chilling effect” on perpetrators. As noted above, it also encourages the reporting of SH, which is beneficial to organizations as well as targets. For example, SH that goes underreported may have significant negative ramifications for organizations, both in terms of how organizations deal with harassment as well as the harassment’s overall financial impact on the firm. Also, organizations are more likely to underestimate the amount and/or severity of SH in their workplaces when SH is not accurately reported. Such organizations are less likely to implement timely policies, procedures, and practices that effectively address workplace SH.

Organizations should be aware that offering a host of formal and informal procedures for dealing with SH will very likely increase the number of reported complaints organization-wide. As noted above, this is because targets are more likely to come forward when they believe their organizations will act supportively. The number of complaints will likely also rise because informal procedures provide non-confrontational options for those targets who prefer a less adversarial solution. As noted earlier, this includes the vast majority of targets who report they use non-confrontational

coping strategies even though they believe these strategies are less effective. Purposefully building less adversarial options into the organization's overall SH program increases the likelihood that non-confrontational options will become effective. This means that targets will have a broader range of coping strategies to better deal with workplace SH. This will reduce the overall costs of SH to organizations.

The overall costs of workplace SH are likely very large. They include the costs of reduced productivity as well as increased absenteeism, turnover, requests for transfers, and use of medical and psychological services (Acken, St. Pierre, & Veglahn, 1991; Faley, Knapp, Kustis, & DuBois, 1998; Frierson, 1989). For example, many targets report they will "leave the field" (turnover) in order to avoid the anticipated consequences of reporting their harassment (Fitzgerald, et al., 1995; Gruber, 1989; Gutek, 1985; Gutek & Koss, 1993). As noted by Faley et al. (1998), turnover costs were by far the largest single component of the \$251 million dollar total annual cost of SH in the U.S Army.

A second implication of the results reported above deals with the nature of the process organizations implement to deal with harassment complaints. For example, organizations need to carefully scrutinize their complaint-related process to ensure it meets or exceeds the minimum legal requirements. Even more importantly, organizations need to understand how their complaint-related procedures are actually implemented; organizations will be judged based on their actions and not what they say on paper. The fact that in the current study the number of target actions taken was inversely related to target perceptions of organizational responses suggests that the two organizations studied may actually penalize targets who use the complaint-related process. The fact that target age and perpetrator/target status affect target perceptions also suggests that what actually occurs may be very different from what these organizations believe occurs. To better determine whether they actually follow their own policy guidelines, organizations should actively collect and analyze hard data as well as data about employee perceptions. For example, changes over time in employee perceptions can be

gauged as part of an annual climate survey.

However, as noted by Gutek (1997), the currently available set of SH-related policies, procedures, and training have not solved the problem of workplace sexual harassment. Moreover, there is far too little available evidence that the recommendations of researchers and practitioners in these areas actually work. This is especially true about SH-related training programs. Gutek (1997) highlights this gap in the empirical research on SH and calls for more empirical work in these areas. Accordingly, Tehrani (1996) suggests that SH will be more effectively remedied when traditional policies that concentrate on addressing unacceptable workplace behaviors are augmented with value-laden ones that define and promote acceptable organizational behaviors. This is consistent with the suggestions of Salisbury and Jaffe (1996) and Grundmann, et al. (1997) that organizations should develop policies that are not purely punitive but also teach perpetrators acceptable behaviors as part of their rehabilitation.

Finally, some of the data reported in the SH surveys cited above suggest there has been only a small change in the patterns and occurrence of SH over time. For example, a very small percentage of targets actually take formal action (8% in the military and 6% for the public-sector sample), and the vast majority of targets report they use ineffective coping strategies to deal with SH. Also, a substantial number of subjects in both Study 1 and Study 2 (20% or more) reported that their organizations retaliated against them as a result of their formal complaint. These percentages are similar to those reported in earlier studies. This makes it even more pressing to heed the call by Gutek (1997) for research to better substantiate the claims made about the current set of SH-related policies, procedures, and training recommended by researchers and practitioners.

Toward this end, we call for future research to more fully test the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1. Among other things, this would require the collection and analysis of longitudinal data. Moreover, this would involve collecting data that would allow the examination of the full constellation of variables that define each of the three factors that are the focus of the model. As better and more comprehensive surveys are conducted over time, this is likely to become a real possibility.

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**Appendix A: Study 1****Organizational Response Favorability**

1. Were hostile or took action against me
2. Unit commander / other officials did nothing
3. Found my charge to be false
4. Found my charge to be true
5. Took action against the person(s) who bothered me
6. Corrected the damage done to me

**Formal Actions**

1. I requested an investigation by my unit commander
2. I requested Mast (Navy hearing)
3. I requested an investigation by a special office (e.g., EO, Social Actions)
4. I requested a judicial board to review the case
5. I requested an investigation by a person above my unit commander
6. I requested an investigation by the Inspector General's Office
7. I requested a temporary assignment elsewhere
8. Other

**Sexual Harassment Severity**

1. sexual whistles, etc.; sexual teasing, etc.; sexually suggestive looks, etc.
2. letters, phone calls; pressure for dates; attempts to get participation in sexual activities
3. sexual touching, leaning over, cornering, brushing against; pressure for sexual favors
4. actual or attempted rape or sexual assault

**Organizational Actions to Prevent / Diminish SH**

1. Establishing policies prohibiting SH
2. Providing swift and thorough investigation of SH complaints
3. Enforcing penalties against unit commanders or superiors who allow SH to continue
4. Enforcing penalties against sexual harassers
5. Publicizing the availability of formal complaint channels
6. Providing counseling services for victims of SH
7. Providing awareness training for active military personnel
8. Providing awareness training for unit commanders and Equal Opportunity officials
9. Establishing a specific office at each base/post which has the authority to investigate complaints regarding SH, provide remedies for victims, and/or penalties against harassers
10. other action (specify)

**Appendix B: Study 2****Organizational Response Favorability**

1. They were hostile or took action against me
2. They did nothing
3. They found my complaint to be false
4. They found my complaint to be true
5. They took action against the person(s) who harassed me
6. They corrected the situation

**Formal Actions**

1. I requested an investigation by my organization.
2. I requested an investigation by an outside agency
3. I filed a grievance or adverse action appeal
4. I filed a discrimination complaint or lawsuit
5. Other

**Sexual Harassment Severity**

1. sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, questions; sexually suggestive looks, gestures
2. letters, phone calls, or materials of a sexual nature; pressure for dates
3. deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering, pinching; pressure for sexual favors
5. stalking; actual or attempted rape or sexual assault

**TABLE 1**  
**Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations**  
**Military Sample<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>FA</u>	<u>PS</u>	<u>TS</u>	<u>TA</u>	<u>SHF</u>	<u>SHS</u>	<u>OA</u>	<u>WGC</u>
Formal action taken	2.4	1.5								
Perpetrator status	3.3	1.4	.15***							
Target status	1.7	.9	.02	.03						
Target age	25.6	5.9	-.01	.06	.64***					
SH frequency	14.3	34.4	.08	.10*	-.01	.04				
SH severity	2.7	1.0	.16***	-.01	-.18***	-.09*		-.01		
Organizational actions	4.4	2.4	-.05	-.06	.04	.08	-.09*	-.03		
Work group composition	2.1	.6	-.02	.01	-.08	-.05	.04	-.01	-.10*	
Organizational response	3.8	1.7	-.20***	-.19***	-.11*	-.14**	-.14**	-.05	.28***	-.03

<sup>a</sup> N = 484.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ., \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**TABLE 2**  
**Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Prediction of**  
**Organizational Response to Formal Action Taken by SH Target**  
**Military Sample<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change
<b>Step 1: Formal Action</b>					
Number of Formal Actions Taken	-.18	.05	-.15***	.04	19.7***
<b>Step 2: Nexus of SH Experience</b>					
Perpetrator/Target Status	-.18	.06	-.14***		
Target Status	-.07	.11	-.04		
Target Age	-.04	.02	-.13*		
SH Frequency/Duration	.00	.00	-.08		
SH Severity	-.08	.08	-.04	.06	6.1***
<b>Step 3: Organizational Characteristics</b>					
Organizational Actions Taken	.20	.03	.27***		
Work Group Composition	-.02	.12	-.01	.07	20.1***
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.15				

<sup>a</sup> N = 484.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ., \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**TABLE 3**  
**Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations**  
**Public Sector Sample<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>FA</u>	<u>PS</u>	<u>TS</u>	<u>TA</u>	<u>SHF</u>	<u>SHS</u>	<u>OA</u>	<u>WGC</u>
Formal actions taken	1.7	1.0								
Perpetrator/target status	3.1	1.3	.32***							
Target status	3.2	1.0	.04	-.05						
Target age	39.0	8.3	-.08	-.09	.08					
SH frequency/duration	34.8	44.3	.28**	.15	-.10	.02				
SH severity	2.8	1.0	.07	-.01	.03	.20	.24**			
Organizational actions taken	2.6	1.0	-.31**	-.28**	-.11	.00	-.13	.07		
Work group composition	1.9	.6	-.01	.10	.00	.10	-.09	.02	-.01	
Organizational response	3.6	2.0	-.40***	-.36***	-.11	-.12	-.24*	.15	.42***	.05

<sup>a</sup> N = 92.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ., \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**TABLE 4**  
**Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Prediction of**  
**Organizational Response to Formal Action Taken by SH Target**  
**Public Sector Sample<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	$R^2$ Change	F Change
<b>Step 1: Formal Action</b>					
Number of Formal Actions Taken	-.46	.19	-.24*	.16	17.2***
<b>Step 2: Nexus of SH Experience</b>					
Perpetrator/Target Status	-.33	.14	-.22*		
Target Status	-.18	.18	-.09		
Target Age	-.05	.02	-.20*		
SH Frequency/Duration	.00	.00	-.16		
SH Severity	.42	.18	.22*	.17	4.3**
<b>Step 3: Organizational Characteristics</b>					
Organizational Actions Taken	.48	.19	.24*		
Work Group Composition	.23	.30	.07	.05	3.5*
Adj $R^2$	.32				

<sup>a</sup> N = 92.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ., \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**FIGURE CAPTION**

**Figure 1.** Factors that influence perceptions of organizational responses to formal actions taken by targets of sexual harassment.

**FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO FORMAL ACTIONS BY TARGETS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

