The Influence of Sex, Gender Bias, and Dress Style on Attitudes Toward Sexual Harassment

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ABSTRACT. This study examined the influence of sex, gender bias, and victim dress style (conservative vs. provocative) on attitudes toward a perceived instance of sexual harassment (SH). A convenience sample of 172 liberal arts college undergraduates responded to a series of surveys measuring SH behavior and attitudes toward this instance of SH and completed an implicit association task measuring gender bias. Results showed that biological sex significantly interacted with dress style and gender bias groupings. Within various gender bias classifications women disagreed more strongly than men that perpetrators of SH should receive no punishment. Similarly, women in the provocative dress style group disagreed more strongly than men in the provocative dress style group that the perpetrator should receive no punishment ($p = .017$). These findings show that the three factors examined in this study (biological sex, gender bias, and dress style) significantly influence SH attitudes. These findings may be utilized in organizational settings, as they illustrate key factors that influence perceptions of SH.

In 1991, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported a total of 10,000 sexual harassment (SH) cases in the United States. Ten years later, the number of SH charges increased by almost 50%, breaking the 15,000 mark in 2001 (U.S. EEOC, 2009). Examining the prevalence of SH on university campuses across the United States, Sandler and Shoop (1997) found that between 30% and 40% of female students had experienced some form of SH from faculty and staff members and that 70% to 90% had experienced some form of SH from peers (c.f., Kearney, Rochlen, & King, 2004). Furthermore, a study conducted by the United Nations looking into the occurrence of SH in 11 European countries similarly found that approximately 30% to 50% of women and 10% of men had experienced some form of SH (European Commission, 1998). With instances of SH increasing in schools and workplaces alike, researchers across the globe have focused their studies on identifying the antecedents of SH, the predictors of SH behavior, and the factors that influence attitudes toward SH. The current study focuses on examining the latter construct.

With SH becoming such a common and universal problem in organizational settings, researchers have begun to ask what factors alter SH perceptions and the attitudes associated with those perceptions (SH attitude). Does sexual inequality within an organizational structure allow for these discriminatory acts to occur without punishment? Is SH attitude embedded into certain personality factors? Is SH attitude affected by implicit cognitive constructs? Past researchers have studied some of these questions, examining both external (e.g., SH training) and internal (e.g., personality) factors as predictors of SH attitude.

External Factors
Past research has attempted to identify organizational factors that may influence the likelihood of engaging in sexual harassment. Timmerman

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and Bajema (2000) studied the constructs of organizational culture using questionnaires that measured perceived occurrences of SH and the perceptions of social climate, gender equality, and bureaucratic procedures within an organization. The questionnaires evaluated the perceptions of balance between a concern for getting work done with a concern for the individual employee. They found that individuals who perceived the company as having a more employee-oriented rather than job-oriented social climate and a high level of gender equality, perceived fewer instances of SH within the organization and were less likely to engage in SH behavior (Pryor, 1987). This study provided further evidence that external factors, such as organizational culture, have the ability to influence attitude toward SH, as well as predict likelihood to sexually harass.

Examining another external factor, Krings and Facchin (2009) studied the effects of distributive justice within an organization as an influence of SH attitude. They found that individuals who perceived their workplace as distributing work-related duties unfairly among employees were more likely to engage in SH-related activities (Pryor, 1987). Although this increased propensity to sexually harass was moderated by personality factors (i.e., neuroticism, agreeableness), the significant relationship between distributive justice and the likelihood to sexually harass identifies distributive justice as another external factor within an organization that has the ability to predict an increase in SH behavior.

Internal Factors
While studies have shown that external factors like social climate and organizational environment play a part in determining SH attitude (Kearney et al., 2004; Krings & Facchin, 2009; Timmerman & Bajema, 2000), researchers also report that internal factors (e.g., personality and gender biases) may also play significant roles in predicting SH attitudes (Kearney et al., 2004; Krings & Facchin, 2009). For example, while Krings and Facchin (2009) found evidence to support that some of the participants’ likelihood to sexually harass was attributed to their perceptions of distributive justice, they also found that two of the Big 5 personality traits (neuroticism and agreeableness) moderated the strength of the relationship.

Kearney et al. (2004) similarly found that an internal factor (i.e., gender role conflict) could significantly alter the strength of an external factor (i.e., SH training exposure) in predicting a change in SH attitude. While SH awareness increased among participants who received SH training, SH attitude was unaffected by the training program. Although SH training was not found to significantly affect SH attitude, the research showed that scores on the success, power, and competition subscales of the Gender Role Conflict Scale (O’Neil, Helms, Gables, David, & Wrightsman, 1986) could more accurately predict a change in SH attitude after training had been administered. These findings suggest that personality factors like perceptions of masculinity and gender role dominance (measured by the Gender Role Conflict Scale) account for more variance in SH attitude than other externally based factors, which was consistent with Krings and Facchin’s (2009) findings. Kearney et al. (2004) concluded that SH attitude may be more related to internal factors like personality and gender role conflict than to other external factors.

Dress Style and Sexualized Perceptions
Although research has not yet evaluated the influence of dress style on SH attitude, dress style has been shown to significantly influence sexualized perceptions of a model. Examining the influence of dress style on impression formation, Cahoon and Edmonds (1989) found that when exposed to two separate pictures of the same model (one provocatively dressed and one conservatively dressed) perceptions of the model changed. Across gender, responses suggested that the provocatively dressed model engaged in more sexual activity, was more promiscuous, and was more likely to be mugged and raped than the same woman dressed in a conservative outfit. Between-gender comparisons also showed that the perception change between models was more drastic for men than for women.

In a similar study, Dill, Brown, and Collins (2008) exposed participants to either (a) images of sex-stereotyped characters from a popular videogame (experimental group) or (b) images of high-powered women in politics (control group). Participants then responded to questions evaluating their tolerance of instances of SH. Findings indicated that individuals who were exposed to the sex-stereotyped videogame images, especially those who were previously familiar with the characters, scored higher on a measure of SH tolerance. Results showed that men exposed to the sex-stereotyped videogame content made judgments that were more tolerant of a real-life instance of SH compared to the control group. This
study showed once again that sexually stereotypical perceptions of an individual can alter SH attitudes and that men’s attitudes change more drastically than women’s.

Prior research has also consistently shown that participant biological sex significantly influences perceptions of a sexualized event. In addition to being more susceptible to the influence of dress style (Cahoon & Edmonds, 1989), studies evaluating attitudes toward date rape and victim-blaming (Mauer & Robinson, 2008) show that men are more likely to attribute a larger amount of responsibility to the victim for its occurrence than women. Similarly, past research by DeSouza and Solberg (2004) found that, in general, women endorsed significantly more severe punishment than men in a scenario of SH. For these reasons, the current study includes biological sex as a major factor in analyzing the influence of gender bias and dress style on attitudes toward SH.

Overview of the Present Study
With evidence from previous research showing that dress style can alter sexualized attitudes toward a model (Cahoon & Edmonds, 1989), the current study investigates dress style as a factor in altering attitudes toward SH. It also evaluates the role of gender bias and biological sex as influential factors of SH attitude, as both have been shown in previous research (Kearney et al., 2004) to significantly influence SH attitude. While past researchers have used explicit (self-report) measures of gender bias (e.g., Gender Role Conflict Scale), the current study uses an implicit measure of gender bias to eliminate social desirability as a limiting factor in measuring the construct. Furthermore, biological sex was evaluated as an influential factor as past research has determined sex as a strong predictor of SH behavior and SH attitude change (Pryor, 1987). It was hypothesized that biological sex, gender bias, and dress style would significantly alter SH attitude and a significant three-way interaction would emerge.

Method
Participants
A convenience sample of 172 liberal arts college undergraduates were recruited through the university research pool and participated as part of a course requirement of introductory level psychology courses. Participant age ranged from 18 to 27 (M = 18.8, SD = 1.2). Sixty-five percent of participants were women (n = 111) and 35% were men (n = 61). A majority of participants (n = 119) identified themselves as White, with Asian individuals comprising the largest minority (n = 24), followed by Black (n = 18), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (n = 3) and American Indian/Alaskan Native (n = 2). The remaining participants declined to identify their race. In regards to ethnicity, the majority of participants identified themselves as being non-Hispanic/Latino (n = 144), while the remaining participants who chose to indicate their ethnicity identified themselves as being of Hispanic/Latino background (n = 24).

Materials
Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale. The Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) Scale (Pryor, 1987) was used to measure the probability of participants’ engagement in sexually exploitive behavior. This measure represents each participant’s personal attitude toward the SH construct. The LSH Scale presents participants with 10 different social scenarios in which they are asked to imagine themselves as the main character in the situation. Each scenario puts the reader into a position of power and afterwards participants are asked to indicate, on a 5-point Likert scale, the likelihood that they would be willing to use this power to elicit sexual acts from their inferior under these conditions. Although three questions are asked after each scenario, only scores from one question are summed to compose the LSH score. Use in past research has shown that the LSH Scale has high reliability and validity. Pryor (1987) reports Cronbach’s alpha scores that exceed .90 and those who score high on the LSH Scale have been shown to display more sexually exploitive behavior than those who score low on the LSH Scale (Pryor, 1987).

While the LSH Scale was originally created for use among men, Luthar and Luthar (2008) altered the names and sexes of the characters in each scenario to evaluate LSH in women as well. Luthar and Luthar (2008) reported high reliability estimates (α = .97) despite their scale modifications. While this study also altered scenario settings to reflect a more industrial atmosphere, in the current study the LSH Scale has only been changed in relation to the biological sex of the characters. As such, the male-oriented test asks men whether they would take sexual advantage of women with less organizational power and the female-oriented test asks women whether they would take sexual advantage of men with less organizational power. Cronbach’s alpha estimates for the current sample were high.
A Punishment Scale was created for the current study. The Punishment Scale (see Appendix B) was developed for this study to measure participants' perceptions of severity of the particular instance of SH presented in the vignette. The Punishment Scale consists of five options involving No Punishment (e.g., “Neither party deserves to be punished as both were intoxicated on the night of the incident”) and five options involving various degrees of Active Punishment (e.g., “Dan should immediately be fired from his position without severance pay”). For each option, participants were asked to score the appropriateness of the punishment on a Likert scale from 1 (“I completely disagree with this consequence”) to 5 (“I completely agree with this consequence”). Consultation was similarly sought in creating the Punishment Scale from the university’s Equal Opportunity Office. An expert on SH provided a list of possible punishments (varying in degree of severity) for a potential perpetrator of SH. The Punishment Scale (see Appendix B) was created from this list. The scale was also informed by past research (DeSouza & Solberg, 2004), which suggests that providing participants with varying options of punishment accurately measures perceptions of severity of an instance of SH. A Total Punishment score was calculated by summing the Active Punishment scores with the reverse coded scores on the No Punishment Subscale. On Active Punishment items, high scores indicate strong agreement that a punishment consequence should occur. On No Punishment items, high scores indicate strong disagreement that no punishment should occur. Internal consistency estimates were performed on Total Punishment, Active Punishment, and No Punishment Scales. Results showed evoked, indicated by the pilot data. Participants in the pilot data were shown a picture line-up of the images and asked to rate on a scale from 1 (very conservative) to 5 (very provocative) their perceptions of the dress style. The image with the lowest overall score was used as the conservative image and the image with the highest overall score was used as the provocative image for the current study.

SH vignette. A SH vignette was created for this study to represent a realistic instance of SH. An expert on SH from the university’s Equal Opportunity Office was consulted, and the vignette was adapted from a case of SH that she had investigated. She later confirmed that the vignette accurately represented a case of common, workplace SH between a superior man and a subordinate woman (see Appendix A).

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Gender-Career Implicit Association Task. The Implicit Association Task (IAT; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009) was used to measure the gender bias construct in the present study. The IAT is a cognitively based test using response-time software to measure unconscious biases based on the speed at which individuals can perform the task. Research conducted by Greenwald et al. (2009) has shown that, in general, implicit methods have predictive validity equal to that of explicit (self-report) methods of testing and high correlations with explicit methods that measure the same construct.

For the purpose of this study, the Gender-Career IAT was used. The Gender-Career IAT measures a personal cognitive bias association between a given gender and a career-oriented or family-oriented lifestyle. Participants are asked to sort male names (i.e., Ben, John, Daniel, Paul, Jeffrey) and female names (i.e., Julia, Michelle, Anna, Emily, Rebecca) into corresponding career-oriented or family-oriented columns. Then, they are asked to sort family-oriented words (i.e., home, parents, children, family, marriage, wedding, relatives) and career-oriented words (i.e., management, professional, corporation, salary, office, business, career) into male and female columns. Based on the speed at which participants are able to correctly categorize the words, the computer program produces a cognitive bias score in one direction or the other. Categorical scores include: “strong association between male-career,” “moderate association between male-career,” “slight association between male-career,” “no association,” “slight association between female-career,” “moderate association between female-career,” and “strong association between female-career.”

Dress style images. Conservative and provocative dress style images were created using Photoshop technology. Images were taken from an online shopping website, and composite images were created to ensure that both images had the same face, expression, and similar body positioning so that outfit choice was the main perceivable difference. Initially three conservative and three provocative outfits were created. Pilot data was collected among 20+ college students as well as five psychology professors to estimate perceptions of promiscuity and conservativeness. The pictures selected for the current study were chosen based on the type of occasion the woman was attending (a holiday work party), as well as perceptions of conservativeness and provocativeness that the outfit evoked, indicated by the pilot data. Participants in the pilot data were shown a picture line-up of the images and asked to rate on a scale from 1 (very conservative) to 5 (very provocative) their perceptions of the dress style. The image with the lowest overall score was used as the conservative image and the image with the highest overall score was used as the provocative image for the current study.
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acceptable levels of reliability, such that Cronbach’s alphas were .84, .80, and .74 respectively.

**Procedure**

Using a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to two experimental groups. Approximately half of the participants were shown an image of Stephanie (the main vignette character) in a provocative dress. The other half was shown an image of Stephanie in a conservative dress. Besides the difference in images, all participants performed the same tasks and responded to the same questionnaires.

All participants were tested in small groups (1 to 12 at a time) in a small computer lab. Participants were given individual folders containing: a demographic questionnaire, a copy of the LSH Scale (specific to biological sex), the SH vignette, and the Punishment Scale. Upon completion of the demographic questionnaire and the LSH Scale, the participant’s attention was directed to a large screen where an image of Stephanie was projected. The following script was then read:

> Before we begin the next section, I want to introduce you all to Stephanie. She is a character in the story you are about to read. Please keep this image of Stephanie in mind as you read the story. Look at her facial features, her clothes, and her body language as you will be asked questions about your perceptions of her story once you are done reading it.

Participants were then asked to read the SH vignette and respond to the Punishment Scale. Once all participants had completed their packets, they were instructed to perform the Gender-Career IAT on the computer screen in front of them. Once complete, they were asked to leave their IAT score reports on the screen in front of them and leave their completed packets at their station. Each participant’s IAT score and dress style group was noted in their completed packets.

**Results**

In preparation for the primary analysis, three separate 2 (sex) x 2 (dress style) x 6 (IAT) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run on the dependent variables (Total Punishment, Active Punishment, No Punishment). Results showed no significant three-way interactions, as only the omnibus ANOVA approached significance. These preliminary analyses, however, revealed significant interactions between sex and IAT on the No Punishment Subscale, as well as between sex and dress style on the No Punishment Subscale. These interactions, however, were not found to be significant for the Active Punishment and Total Punishment dependent variables. Based on this finding, the No Punishment Subscale was used as a dependent variable in lower order analyses. Because the No Punishment Subscale was reverse coded in calculating the Total Punishment Scale, high scores indicate strong disagreement with the no punishment consequence and low scores indicate strong agreement with the no punishment consequence.

**Primary Analyses of Punishment**

**The interaction of sex and dress style.** In order to evaluate the interaction of sex and dress style on responses to the No Punishment Scale, a 2 (sex) x 2 (dress style) ANOVA was conducted. This analysis showed that among participants in the provocative dress style group, women scored significantly higher ($M = 22.03, SD = 3.14$) on the No Punishment Scale than men ($M = 19.83, SD = 3.81$), $F(3, 168) = 3.51, p = .017, \eta^2_p = .06$. This suggests that women in the provocative dress style group expressed stronger disagreement than men with no punishment consequences for the harasser (see Table 1). No sex differences for punishment scores were found in the conservative dress style group.

**The interaction of sex and gender bias.** A 2 (sex) x 6 (IAT) ANOVA, conducted on the No Punishment Scale, revealed a significant interaction, $F(10, 160) = 1.90, p = .048, \eta^2_p = .06$. This model showed that among participants with Slight Male-Career associations, women ($M = 22.57, SD = 2.68$) scored significantly higher ($p < .001$) on the No Punishment Scale than men ($M = 18.36, SD = 4.27$), suggesting that women with this type of gender bias more strongly disagree with forms of no punishment for the harasser than men (see Table 2).

Results also suggest that among men, those with Moderate Male-Career biases, No Gender-Career Association, and Moderate Female-Career biases report significantly higher scores ($p < .05$) on the No Punishment Scale than those with Slight Male-Career biases. Likewise, among women, those with Slight Male-Career biases report significantly higher scores ($p = .045$) than women who have No Gender-Career Associations (see Table 2).

**The influence of sex.** Independent sample $t$-tests were run to evaluate biological sex differences
on the Punishment Scales (i.e., No Punishment, Active Punishment and Total Punishment) as well as on each item of the Total Punishment Scale. The initial t tests revealed that women (M = 21.86, SD = 3.15) scored significantly higher than men (M = 20.46, SD = 3.55) on the No Punishment Scale, t(170) = .043, p < .001, however, significant sex differences were not observed for Active and Total Punishment Scales. This finding indicates that women tend to more strongly disagree with no punishment consequences for the harasser across both dress style and IAT groups compared to men. Individual t tests were then conducted for each item of the Punishment Scale. This analysis revealed that women (M = 3.75, SD = 1.16) disagreed significantly more than men (M = 4.27, SD = 0.91) with consequence 2 (“Neither party deserves to be punished as both were intoxicated on the night of the incident”), t(170) = -3.21, p = .007.

**The influence of LSH.** Pearson’s correlation was used to calculate the relationship between Total Punishment score and LSH score, which suggested a significant negative relationship (r = -.29, p < .001). This indicates that as the participants’ LSH increased, their agreement with total punishment responses for the harasser decreased. This negative relationship was not only seen in the participant’s Total Punishment score, but also in the Active Punishment score (r = -.23, p < .001) suggesting that those with higher LSH scores agree less with Active Punishment consequences. No Punishment scores were also found to be negatively correlated with LSH (r = -.30, p < .001). However, because the No Punishment Scale was reverse coded, this correlation should be interpreted inversely, such that, as participant’s LSH increased, their agreement with no punishment responses increased. In sum, these correlations show that among participants with high LSH, agreement with Total and Active Punishment consequences decreased and agreement with No Punishment consequences increased. While the correlations between Punishment and LSH were found to be significant among all participants, between-sex differences were also evaluated. In all cases, the correlation strength was stronger for men than women in the sample.

### Primary Analysis of LSH

**The interaction of sex and gender bias.** A 2 (sex) x 6 (IAT) ANOVA was conducted on the LSH variable, which revealed a significant interaction, F(10, 160) = 5.73, p < .001, η² = 5.729. The model revealed that men in the Strong Male-Career IAT category scored significantly lower than men in the slight male-career bias category on the LSH variable. Further analysis of simple main effects showed that men reported stronger tendencies to sexually harass in moderate male-career, slight male-career and no association categories when compared to women in the same category (see Table 2).

**The influence of sex.** An independent samples t test was conducted to evaluate the sex differences in the participant’s likelihood to sexually harass. Because Levene’s Test was violated, the statistic in which equal variances is not assumed was interpreted. The t test t(170) = -2.66, p < .001, showed that men (M = 16.81, SD = 8.81) scored significantly higher in the participant’s likelihood to sexually harass than women (M = 15.50, SD = 7.97).

### Table 1

The Interaction of Sex and Dress Style on No Punishment Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Punishment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.31</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>3.81</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<td>21.64</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22.03</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note:* Indicates a significant between-sex difference p < .05.

### Table 2

The Interaction of Sex and Gender Bias on No Punishment and LSH

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>n</th>
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<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong M-C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.15</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>13.28</td>
<td>6.23</td>
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<tr>
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<td>20.90</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>17.90</td>
<td>9.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slight M-C</td>
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<td>18.36</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>18.82</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Association</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>15.47</td>
<td>8.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slight F-C</td>
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<td>20.75</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>17.00</td>
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<td>22.67</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong M-C</td>
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<td>2.97</td>
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<td>10.00</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* A indicates a significant between-IAT difference p < .05; B indicates a significant between-sex difference p < .05.
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higher than women ($M = 10.57$, $SD = 1.78$) on the LSH Scale.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of biological sex, gender bias, and dress style on attitudes toward SH. It was predicted that these three factors would significantly influence SH attitude (measured by the Punishment Scale), however, results showed that the three-way interaction of these factors only approached significance. Although the primary hypothesis of this study was not supported, results show many interesting differences between sexes in their attitudes toward SH.

First, dress style was examined. Cahoon and Edmonds (1989) found that men’s perceptions were significantly altered by provocative dress style. The current study confirms past findings that perceptions may be significantly altered by provocative dress style (Cahoon & Edmonds, 1989). The current study found that women were less likely than men to agree with No Punishment consequences for the harasser if the victim in the case was provocatively dressed. We can infer from this finding that men and women disagree with consequence severity for SH behavior and men, in particular, base part of their decision on the dress style of the victim.

Secondly, gender bias was examined as an influential factor of SH attitude. Significant differences arose between men and women based on gender bias groupings. Among individuals with slight male-career biases, women more strongly disagreed with no punishment consequences than men in the same instance of SH. Although significant differences were not found in all bias groups, this finding suggests that significant differences do exist and may have been uncovered had there been more participants, greater power, and a more equal distribution among groups. Among men, significant differences in SH attitude were also observed between various gender bias groups. While the expected linear trend did not emerge, the variance shows that gender bias does have an influence on SH attitude for men. It also highlights the fact that gender bias plays a significantly larger role in altering SH attitude for men, as no significant differences were observed between women in various gender bias groupings.

Third, biological sex was examined. Past research by DeSouza and Solberg (2004) found that women endorsed significantly more severe punishment than men in a scenario of SH. The current study’s results are consistent with these past findings, as women were found to disagree more strongly with forms of non-punishment for an offender of SH than men. Specifically, the current study found that in an instance of SH, women were 22% less likely to agree than men that “Neither party deserves to be punished as both were intoxicated on the night of the incident.” Furthermore, responses to this statement (the only punishment option involving alcohol) accounted for the greatest degree of variance in the total No Punishment score, as it was the only item to show a significant response difference between sexes. This suggests that men may perceive intoxication as a legitimate rationalization for SH behavior; a trend that should be examined in future research.

Finally, a negative correlation between LSH and punishment scores was discovered, confirming the significant sex difference found in No Punishment scores. Overall, men scored significantly higher than women on the LSH Scale and, as the correlation indicates, agreed more with No Punishment consequences and less with Active Punishment consequences than women.

Because this study used a convenience sample of primarily 18 to 20-year-old, White college students, these findings are limited in generalizability. While SH occurs in occupational and educational settings alike, they differ in various aspects as well. Because of this, future research may consider using a corporate-employee participant pool to increase ecological validity. Power may have also played a role in preventing the three-way interaction (sex, gender bias, and dress style) from reaching significance, as the crossover created multiple cells of unequal variances. In future research, however, increasing the size of the participant pool may help to equalize cell-size variance.

Future researchers should also consider using other measures of implicit gender bias, as the Gender-Career IAT measures a specific type of bias and is not a measure of overall gender biases. The Gender-Career IAT was selected to evaluate gender bias closely associated with the workplace, however, an IAT designed to evaluate gender biases, including facets beyond a gender association with career (and perhaps with fewer categorical levels) may be a better measure for future research. It is also recommended that the length of the Punishment Scale be increased, such that participants may choose between more options of punishment and no punishment, especially if using subscales as dependent variables. This may increase the
likelihood of finding significant results on the Total and Active Punishment dependent variables, which were not found in this study.

Order effects may have also been a limiting factor in this study. All participants were given the same sequence of questionnaires and surveys and the questions composing these questionnaires and surveys were presented in the same order for each participant. Future research may account for these order effects by randomizing the question sequencing within each survey, particularly the Punishment Scale, as order effects may have influenced participant responses. Future research may also consider randomizing the order that participants respond to entire surveys, as fatigue effects may weigh heavier on later responses. Although the current study placed the IAT at the end of participant tasks, future research may consider placing it at the beginning of the study to diminish possible order, fatigue, and other confounding effects.

Participant sexuality may have also played a limiting role in this study. Items on the LSH (asking participants if they would take sexual advantage of a subordinate of the opposite sex) may not pertain to non-heterosexual participants. Sexual orientation was not included as a demographic question as requested by the institution due to its sensitive nature.

Future research should also evaluate the influence of alcohol more thoroughly, as this was an unexpected finding. The item on the No Punishment Scale involving alcohol (“Neither party deserves to be punished as both were intoxicated on the night of the incident”) accounted for the greatest variance in Punishment Scale responses. For men, the presence of alcohol markedly influenced attitudes toward SH, a concept that should be explored in depth in the future.

Overall, the current study examines a relevant issue in today’s society. It explores the question: Do men and women respond to SH differently? Concluding results show that they do. Men and women’s perceptions are influenced differently by external circumstances, like the presence of alcohol and victim dress-style, and by internal factors, like gender bias. Women disagree that no action should be taken against a sexual harasser with far more certainty than men. Men are resoundingly more lenient toward the harasser, agreeing more with nonpunishing action. Applied in a forensic setting, male jurors may suggest unfairly lenient consequences for a sexual harasser. Applied in an organizational setting, male supervisors may be more likely to allow SH behavior to go unpunished. This study also calls attention to the presence of alcohol at work-related events, as it has been shown to influence men’s attitudes toward an instance of SH. In the case of environmental factors (i.e., dress style, alcohol), these characteristics are important to note with the intent that proper precautions be made to decrease the likelihood of an instance of SH from occurring. However, the more prevalent issue is the attitude-altering effect that these factors have on individuals. While the current study has shown that sex, gender bias, and dress style influence SH attitudes, future research may attempt to answer the question why?

References

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Sex, Gender Bias, Dress Style, and Sexual Harassment

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Please read the account below carefully as you will be asked questions about your perceptions and opinions of the case afterward.

Stephanie was 23 when she got a new job as a secretary for a division of the state government. Two weeks into her new job she received an email notifying her that the annual holiday party would be held that weekend in the office building. When the weekend rolled around, excited to meet some new people, Stephanie got dressed and went to the office party. Stephanie was eager to get better acquainted with her coworkers and supervisors, as she was one of the newest members of the staff and after getting a picture taken at the entrance, she decided to have a drink at the open bar to loosen up. The night was going well and Stephanie felt like she was really integrating well with all of the staff.

Heading back to the bar with her coworker Anne, Stephanie bumped into her supervisor, Dan, who had just ordered a glass of wine. Dan began asking Stephanie if she was enjoying her new position in the office and Stephanie told him that everyone in the office had been very helpful with her transition. Leaning in so that Anne couldn’t hear, Dan whispered something into Stephanie’s ear that made her noticeably uncomfortable. Her look of shock was quickly noticed by Anne, who then excused herself and Stephanie from the situation.

She walked Stephanie out into the lobby and in private, Stephanie told Anne what Dan had said. As he leaned into Stephanie’s ear, Dan whispered that he had had a crush on her since she had started working for him two weeks ago. Anne was convinced that Dan’s comment was completely innocent, telling Stephanie that Dan had been happily married for 26 years. Being a bright, bubbly woman, Stephanie was used to being hit on by men, and although Dan’s comment caught her off guard, she realized that Anne was probably right and that Dan had probably just been trying to compliment her. Not wanting the encounter to ruin her night, she and Anne decided to go back to the banquet room and share another drink before the bar closed.

Arriving back at the bar, Dan seemed cavalier, sipping his glass of red wine and charmingly chatting with another young intern. As Stephanie and Anne ordered their drink, Dan came up to them again. Realizing that they’re probably had too much to drink, Anne asked if Dan would be willing to drive them home. Dan quickly agreed, enthusiastically saying that it would be his pleasure.

The car ride was quiet for the most part, as everyone was tired from the long night. Dan dropped Anne off first and wished her a good night just a few blocks away and upon arrival, Dan similarly wished her a good night adding that she “really did look lovely tonight.” As she was getting out of the car, Dan leaned across the passenger seat, reached underneath Stephanie’s dress and squeezed her thigh. Turning back with a look of shock and disgust, Stephanie slammed the car door and raced into her house. The next day at work, Dan acted as if nothing had ever happened.

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Appendix A

Please circle what type of consequence you think Dan should receive on the 5-point scale below each item.

Opinions should range from 1 (I completely DISAGREE with the consequence) to 5 (I completely AGREE with the consequence).

Keep in mind that you may completely agree/disagree with more than one response.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1. No action against Dan should be taken as Stephanie was leading him on.</th>
<th>2. Neither party deserves to be punished as both were intoxicated on the night of the incident.</th>
<th>3. Dan should receive an official written warning to be placed in his permanent file.</th>
<th>4. Due to insufficient information, Stephanie’s complaint should be disregarded.</th>
<th>5. The offense should be perceived as a case of mistaken communication and no action should be taken.</th>
<th>6. Dan should be placed on a 2-week unpaid suspension, to give Stephanie time to process the event.</th>
<th>7. Upon completion of a full investigation, the Human Resources team should seek legal action against Dan’s behavior.</th>
<th>8. Stephanie’s complaint should be disregarded as Dan probably realizes that his actions were inappropriate.</th>
<th>9. Dan should be required to attend an intensive sexual harassment training program.</th>
<th>10. Dan should immediately be fired from his position without severance pay.</th>
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