

# THE MODERATING ROLES OF RACE AND GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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Although previous research has linked sexual harassment to negative psychological outcomes, few studies have focused on moderators of these relationships. The present study surveyed Black ( $n = 88$ ) and White ( $n = 170$ ) female undergraduates who endorsed experiences of sexual harassment to examine whether traditional gender attitudes differentially moderated the relationship between sexual harassment and three outcomes: posttraumatic stress symptoms, general clinical symptoms, and satisfaction with life. We replicated past findings that sexual harassment is related to negative outcomes. Further, the results supported our hypothesis that less traditional gender attitudes (i.e., more feminist attitudes) would buffer the negative effects of sexual harassment for White women, whereas the same attitudes would exacerbate its negative effects for Black women. We discuss reasons for these differences, including Black women's double consciousness and differences in the meaning of feminist and traditional gender attitudes for Black and White women.

Across a variety of settings, including academia, sexual harassment has been found to be one of the most common forms of gendered violence and has consistently been associated with detrimental psychological, physical, and academic/occupational consequences (e.g., Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman, & Drasgow, 1999; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004; O'Donohue, Downs, & Yeater, 1998; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997; Shupe, Cortina, Ramos, Fitzgerald, & Salisbury, 2002). Despite these well established findings, relatively little is known of the moderating factors that may ameliorate or exacerbate these negative effects. We propose two such moderators that may be relevant to the experience of harassment-related psychological symptoms: traditional gender attitudes and race. Although previous research has examined both racial and attitudinal differences in the frequency of sexual harassment, few studies have examined these factors as moderators of the effect of sexual harassment on psychological outcomes. Further, no other studies

to date have examined the combined interactive effect of race and gender attitudes on the relationship between sexual harassment frequency and psychological well-being.

We suggest that the relationship between sexual harassment and psychological outcomes will be affected by the extent to which women hold traditional gender attitudes and that this relationship will differ for White and Black women. We theorize that, for White women experiencing sexual harassment, less traditional (more feminist) attitudes may allow them to attribute their negative treatment to external, social factors, which may lead to more positive psychological outcomes than women with more traditional gender attitudes. However, for Black women, less traditional attitudes may heighten awareness of oppression based on their multiple devalued group memberships, resulting in worse psychological outcomes than those with more traditional gender attitudes.

## *Sexual Harassment and Psychological Outcomes*

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sex-related comments and behaviors that are appraised as offensive, exceeding available coping resources, or threatening (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980) has further specified that such sex-related behaviors constitute sexual harassment when they create a hostile environment or are used as a condition of evaluation. Sexual harassment encompasses gender harassment

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(e.g., negative comments about women's abilities), unwanted sexual attention (e.g., repeated requests for dates, attempts to touch or kiss someone against her will), and sexual coercion (e.g., attempts to coerce sexual cooperation via education- or employment-related threats or benefits; Fitzgerald, 1996).

The link between sexual harassment and psychological well-being has been consistently supported in empirical research for a variety of psychological conditions, such as increased depression, anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Magley, 1999; Glomb et al., 1999; Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000; Palmieri, 2002; Schneider et al., 1997). In a national random sample of adult women, 10% of sexual harassment targets met full criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997). Among sexual harassment plaintiffs, these rates increased to 68% (Fitzgerald, Buchanan, Collinsworth, Magley, & Ramos, 1999). In both of these studies, the PTSD symptoms were specifically related to the sexual harassment experiences. Further, even moderate and low-level harassment have been found to result in negative psychological consequences (Schneider et al., 1997), such as negative self-beliefs, beliefs of personal vulnerability, self-doubt, and powerlessness (Lott, 1996). Additionally, Landrine and Klonoff (1997) argued that, because sexist events (e.g., sexual harassment) are personal attacks on one's gender, an essential, unchangeable characteristic of the self, they might result in increased psychological harm.

### *The Role of Traditional Gender Attitudes*

Because sexual harassment frequently pertains to gender-related roles and personal constructs (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997), it may also increase the salience of one's gender identity. Therefore, women's beliefs and attitudes regarding gender may be instrumental in moderating the negative relationship between sexual harassment and psychosocial outcomes. Previous studies have hypothesized a direct relationship between sexual harassment and traditional gender attitudes, theorizing that the experience of sexual harassment would lead women to reject more traditional gender attitudes (Downing & Roush, 1985) or that more feminist attitudes would lead women to recognize their negative experiences as sexual harassment (Fischer, Tokar, Good, Hill, & Blum, 2000). Results of some studies have provided some support for the psychological benefits associated with holding feminist attitudes. For example, women's high levels of feminist consciousness have been associated with psychological well-being and resiliency (Fischer & Good, 2004; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996) and coping with sexism (Klonis, Endo, Crosby, & Worell, 1997). Researchers have also found that traditional gender attitudes were related to more frequent sexist experiences (Moradi & Subich, 2002).

Other studies looking at the relationships among sexual harassment, gender attitudes, and feminist identity, however, have found mixed results. For example, in a sample of college women, Fischer and Good (1994) found that women with higher levels of feminist identification reported more observations of gender bias in the classroom and curriculum, although not more sexual harassment. Another study of women found that traditional gender attitudes were negatively correlated with reports of lifetime sexist events. Traditional gender attitudes and recent sexist events, however, were unrelated (Fischer et al., 2000). Thus, although gender attitudes appear to be related to one's awareness of gender-related issues, their relationship to sexual harassment is inconsistent.

These inconsistent results suggest that, rather than theorizing that gender attitudes will be directly related to sexual harassment, it may be more useful to conceptualize gender attitudes as a moderator of the effect of sexual harassment on psychological outcomes. In particular, less traditional, more feminist gender attitudes may serve as a buffer to the negative outcomes typically associated with sexual harassment experiences. There is some empirical support for this notion. For example, in the aforementioned study by Moradi and Subich (2002), there was tentative support for a moderating effect of traditional gender attitudes on the relationship between recent (in the past year) perceived sexist events and psychological distress. Their findings suggested that women who endorsed more traditional gender attitudes and did not acknowledge gender discrimination reported more psychological distress related to recent sexist experiences. Similarly, Landrine and Klonoff (1997) found that the relationship between sexist events and distress was stronger for women who described themselves as nonfeminists than for women who described themselves as feminists. Thus, less traditional and more feminist attitudes may serve a protective function for the well-being of women experiencing sexual harassment. It is possible that women who endorse gender stereotypes may attribute gender bias and discrimination to personal faults, whereas feminists may be able to recognize such situations as unjust aspects of society. In doing so, they may be able to better insulate themselves from the negative psychological consequences of sexual harassment (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997).

### *Racial Differences in the Moderating Effect of Traditional Gender Attitudes*

Although there is support for the buffering effect of less traditional, more feminist attitudes on the relationship between sexual harassment and psychological outcomes, these findings have largely been based on samples of White women and may not function similarly for Black women. For Black women, holding less traditional, more feminist attitudes may actually serve to exacerbate the negative effects of sexual harassment. This distinction may be rooted

in cultural differences in the meaning of gender roles and attitudes and in Black women's membership in multiple devalued groups based on their race and gender. Further, to date, theories of gender roles, identity, and stereotyped attitudes have largely been developed on and applied to the experiences of White women, with little consideration of their appropriateness for women of color (Moradi, 2005). In their survey of 229 undergraduate women, Myaskovski and Wittig (1997) found that only 8% identified themselves as feminists, compared to 33% of White women. Nevertheless, Black women often endorse the personal importance of feminist tenets (e.g., Martin & Hall, 1992). It is possible that the incongruence between Black women's feminist ideology and willingness to self-label as a feminist stems from their relative absence during the development of feminist theory.

Black women occupy a unique social space created by the intersection of ethnic and gender statuses (DeFour, David, Diaz, & Thompkins, 2003), sometimes referred to as "ethgender" (Jeffries & Ransford, 1980). Empirical research provides support for the importance of a fused Black-woman identity (reflecting identification with both Black people and women; Settles, 2006), which may result in Black women's tendency to perceive experiences in terms of both race and gender (Almquist, 1995). Because of their membership in devalued race and gender groups, Black women may be more likely to experience "double jeopardy," a term first used by Frances Beal (1970) to describe the multiple domains of harassment and discrimination experienced by Black women based on their gender and race (King, 1988). Further, there is empirical evidence that, in addition to racial oppression and gender oppression, Black women also experience unique forms of harassment and assault that combine race and gender simultaneously (Buchanan, 2005; Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Essed, 1992; Martin, 1994; Texiera, 2002).

Theorists have also noted that traditional and feminist attitudes may not have the same meaning for women of color as they do for White women (hooks, 1989, 2000). For White women, more feminist attitudes may lead to externalization of attributions for negative treatment (e.g., sexual harassment). In contrast, for Black women, feminist attitudes may lead to increased double consciousness with respect to race and gender. Double consciousness refers to the finding that racial consciousness is associated with feminist consciousness (Gay & Tate, 1998). Theorists suggest that this double consciousness may lead to increased salience of discrimination and harassment directed at Black people (of either gender) and directed at women (of any race; Gay & Tate, 1998). Moreover, Black women's double consciousness may also make them more aware of the discrimination and harassment that is uniquely targeted at them as Black women (i.e., that is distinct from discrimination toward Black men or non-Black women). In other words, double consciousness, associated with more feminist attitudes, may heighten Black women's awareness of the double jeopardy

they face. As a result, when sexual harassment does occur, the resulting negative psychological effects may be intensified.

In sum, for Black women who have experienced sexual harassment, holding less traditional and more feminist attitudes may promote their double consciousness, making them more aware of the multiple oppressions that they, and other Black women, are more likely to face. For White women, less traditional and more feminist attitudes may instead allow them to attribute their oppression to external (e.g., misogyny) rather than personal (e.g., personal incompetence) factors, without adding to their sense of victimization. Further, in contrast to White women, feminist beliefs about gender may not adequately represent the perceptions of gender and gender roles held by Black women. For these reasons, we theorized that less traditional gender attitudes would buffer psychological outcomes for sexually harassed White women; however, for Black women experiencing sexual harassment, we predicted that less traditional gender attitudes would exacerbate their negative psychological outcomes.

### *The Current Study*

The current study sought to further our understanding of the outcomes associated with women's experiences of sexual harassment by examining the moderating roles of gender-role attitudes and race. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1999; Glomb et al., 1999; Munson et al., 2000; Schneider et al., 1997), we hypothesized that sexual harassment would be related to negative psychological outcomes among sexually harassed women. We contribute to the existing literature on the negative gender-related experiences of college women by looking at female undergraduates who have experienced sexual harassment (Cortina, Swan, Fitzgerald, & Waldo, 1998; Paludi & Paludi, 2003). In addition, we looked at multiple psychological outcomes: posttraumatic stress (PTS) symptoms, general symptoms of distress, and life satisfaction, allowing us to evaluate both the severity of the effects of sexual harassment and its implications for general perceptions about quality of life.

Because Black women are members of (at least) two devalued groups and because the salience and meaning of traditional gender-role attitudes may differ from those of White women, we proposed that the moderating effect of traditional gender attitudes would differ for Black and White women. Specifically, we hypothesized that more feminist attitudes would buffer the negative effects of sexual harassment for White women, whereas more feminist attitudes would exacerbate the negative effects of sexual harassment for Black women. Thus, we examined whether the previously found moderating relationships vary for Black and White women, which has important implications for our understanding of how sexual harassment differentially affects women.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university and were recruited through the psychology department subject pool and student organizations. Students of color were purposefully oversampled by soliciting participants from campus locations and organizations that pertained to racial/ethnic affairs (e.g., Multicultural Center, Black Student Alliance) or organizations with largely non-White membership (e.g., predominantly Black sororities). Black and White undergraduate women ( $N = 370$ ) completed a survey on their sexual harassment experiences within the past 12 months. The current sample ( $n = 258$ ) consisted of Black ( $n = 88$ ) and White ( $n = 170$ ) participants who endorsed having any experience of sexual harassment as measured by the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995). Participants were defined as having any sexual harassment experiences if their total SEQ score was greater than zero. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 50 years ( $M = 20.30$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ). Undergraduate students of all years were represented: 15.1% first year, 22.1% second year, 27.9% third year, 30.6% fourth year, and 3.9% fifth year. The majority of participants identified as single (83.3%), with an additional 13.2% identifying as partnered, and 1.2% identifying as married. A small number (0.8%) of participants reported having children.

### Procedures

Written informed consent was obtained from participants immediately prior to participation in the study. Participants completed a paper-and-pencil survey that took about 35 minutes and were compensated with either research credit (subject pool participants) or \$5 and pizza (student organization participants). After completion of the survey, participants were given a written explanation of the goals of the study and a list of campus and community resources related to mental health and harassment. The presentation order of instruments and individual items was planned to minimize bias. The survey was laid out such that the outcome variables (with the exception of the PTS scale) were presented prior to questions on harassment so that the assessment of sequelae would not be affected by thoughts and feelings evoked by endorsing harassment items.

### Measures

**Year in school.** Year in school was included as a control variable (1 = first-year student, 2 = second-year student, 3 = third-year student, 4 = fourth-year student, 5 = fifth-year student) because previous studies have found it to be related to reports of sexual harassment (Cortina et al., 1998).

**Race.** Participants self-reported their race (0 = White, 1 = Black).

**Traditional gender attitudes.** The Macho Scale (Touhey, 1979; Villemez & Touhey, 1977) is a 28-item scale that measures gender attitudes and sex-role stereotyping. The scale has been shown to have an inverse relationship with pro-feminist attitudes (Gayton, Sawyer, Baird, & Ozman, 1982; Sattem, Savells, & Murray, 1984). Sample items include: "For the most part, it is better to be a man than to be a woman"; "No matter what people say, women really like dominant men"; "Parents usually maintain stricter control over their daughters than their sons, and they should"; "In general, it is more important for a man to be successful in his career than it is for a woman." Participants rate each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). After reverse coding appropriate items, responses were averaged such that higher scores reflected more traditional, gender-stereotyped attitudes and low scores reflected more egalitarian, feminist attitudes (e.g., equality between men and women). The scale's authors reported test-retest reliabilities ranging from .89 to .94 (Villemez & Touhey, 1977), and the scale has been found to function similarly by gender (DeJudicibus & McCabe, 2001; Mazer & Percival, 1989; Touhey, 1979; Villemez & Touhey, 1977). For this study, 20 of the original items were selected on the basis of the results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The EFA indicated support for the unidimensionality of the short scale. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 5.23 and accounted for 26% of the variance. Although the EFA extracted additional factors with eigenvalues over 1.0 (the next eigenvalue was 1.54), these factors accounted for a minimal amount of the remaining variance and did not increase the scale's interpretability. The 20-item scale demonstrated adequate reliability for the overall sample (see Table 1; Black women = .81, White women = .84).

**Frequency of sexual harassment.** Participants answered a 16-item version of the SEQ (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald et al., 1995), containing multiple items that assess participants' experiences of unwanted sex-based behaviors from a teacher, classmate, advisor, or staff member within the past 12 months. The SEQ measures three categories of unwanted sex-related behaviors (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gelfand et al., 1995): gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (e.g., "told suggestive stories or offensive jokes," "continued to ask you out for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though you had said 'no,'" "made unwanted attempts to stroke or fondle you"). Respondents indicated how often they experienced these behaviors (sexual harassment frequency), but need not have labeled these experiences as sexual harassment. Using a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*many times*), items were averaged such that higher scores indicated more frequent experiences of sexual harassment. The SEQ is the most widely used measure of sexual harassment with strong psychometric properties and high internal consistency. As such, it is generally regarded as the most comprehensive

**Table 1**  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Variables for All Participants

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Year							
2. Race	-.01						
3. Traditional gender attitudes	-.12 <sup>†</sup>	.31**	(.84)				
4. Sexual harassment	-.15*	.04	.06	(.88)			
5. Posttraumatic stress symptoms	-.14*	.08	.10	.38**	(.94)		
6. Symptoms of distress	-.11 <sup>†</sup>	-.13*	.10	.29**	.53**	(.93)	
7. Satisfaction with life	-.01	-.10	-.08	-.13*	-.30**	-.42**	(.90)
Mean	2.86	—	1.46	.46	7.47	17.68	24.45
SD	1.13	—	.52	.46	10.26	15.25	6.71

Note. Correlations appear below the diagonal, and coefficient alphas are presented in parentheses along the diagonal. For Race: 0 = White, 1 = Black. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

paper-and-pencil instrument available for assessing sexually harassing experiences (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995). Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, and Waldo (1999) reported the SEQ reliability coefficient to be .94. The SEQ has been used with samples of women of color, including Black women (Bergman & Drasgow, 2003; Buchanan, Bergman, Bruce, & Lichty, 2006), and the reliability in the current study was similar for Black women (.89) and White women (.87).

**PTS symptoms.** The PTSD Checklist (PCL; Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska, & Keane, 1993) is a 17-item self-report measure of the severity of PTS symptoms as defined by the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Item examples include: “suddenly acting or feeling as if the stressful experience were happening again,” “avoiding activities or situations because they reminded you of the stressful experience,” and “feeling jumpy or easily startled.” The PCL followed the SEQ, and the scale instructions were modified slightly to inquire about participants’ reactions to their sexual harassment experiences within the last month, using a rating scale that ranged from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). Responses were summed to comprise a total score, with higher scores reflecting more frequent PTS symptoms in response to their sexual harassment experiences. The PCL has strong reliability, test-retest reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity with other measures of PTSD (Ruggiero, Del Ben, Scotti, & Rabalais, 2003; Weathers & Ford, 1996).

**Symptoms of psychological distress.** An abbreviated version of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) was used to assess clinical symptomology (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983; Derogatis & Spencer, 1982). The BSI is a self-report scale designed to measure the frequency of a variety of clinical symptoms and complaints within the past week (e.g., “faintness or dizziness,” “feeling lonely,” “feeling fearful”) on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). Twenty-eight items assessing five of the BSI subscales (De-

pression, Anxiety, Somatization, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoid Ideation) were summed to yield the General Severity Index (GSI). The GSI reflected an overall level of psychological distress using the summed total score of the items with higher scores reflecting greater clinical distress. The BSI has strong convergent and predictive validity in both nonclinical and clinical populations. The GSI has a 2-week test-retest reliability of .90 and high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha .71–.85; Derogatis, 1993; Derogatis & Savits, 2000; Derogatis & Spencer, 1982). In similar studies of harassed women (that included women of color), the internal consistency has been found to be quite high (e.g., Moradi & Subich, 2004,  $\alpha = .97$ ; Cortina, 2004,  $\alpha = .92$ ), which is comparable to the reliability found in the present study ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Life satisfaction.** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a 5-item scale measuring perceptions of general satisfaction with life (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life,” “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing”). Respondents rated how they felt about their lives in general by endorsing items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sum of the items was calculated to produce a life satisfaction score; higher numbers indicated more satisfaction with life. Diener et al. (1985) found that the items have high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and a 2-month test-retest correlation coefficient of .82.

## RESULTS

Table 1 displays the correlations, means, standard deviations, and internal consistency reliability estimates for the variables used in the current study. There was an inverse relationship between year in school and frequency of sexual harassment, such that the survey responses of more advanced students indicated that they experienced less frequent sexual harassment behaviors. More advanced students also reported fewer PTS symptoms. Black women

reported more traditional gender attitudes than White women; Black women also reported fewer symptoms of distress than White women. The frequency of sexual harassment was positively related to PTS symptomology and symptoms of distress and negatively related to life satisfaction. The psychological outcome measures were significantly related to each other in the expected directions: PTS and clinical symptoms of distress were positively related to each other whereas satisfaction with life was inversely correlated with both PTS and clinical symptoms of distress.

Three hierarchical multiple regressions were used to examine gender attitudes and race as moderators of the negative relationship we observed between sexual harassment and psychological well-being in our bivariate correlations. For all three multiple regressions, year in school, race, traditional gender attitudes, and frequency of sexual harassment were entered on the first step. On the second step, two-way interaction terms (race  $\times$  traditional gender attitudes, race  $\times$  sexual harassment, and traditional gender attitudes  $\times$  sexual harassment) were entered. On the third step, the three-way interaction term was entered (race  $\times$  traditional gender attitudes  $\times$  sexual harassment). Independent variables used to create interaction terms were first centered and the interaction terms were formed multiplicatively (Aiken & West, 1991). The dependent variables for these analyses were PTS symptomatology, symptoms of clinical distress, and satisfaction with life.

Table 2 presents the model predicting PTS symptoms. The first block of variables accounted for a significant portion of the variance in PTS symptoms. More frequent experiences of sexual harassment were associated with higher levels of PTS symptoms. The two-way interactions entered

on the second step accounted for a significant additional portion of the variance in PTS symptoms. The results suggested a significant interaction between race and traditional gender attitudes. However, this interaction was qualified by a significant three-way interaction between race, traditional gender attitudes, and frequency of sexual harassment. The relationship among these variables was graphed (see Figure 1) and simple slope analyses were conducted (see Table 3) to determine whether each slope differed significantly from zero (Aiken & West, 1991). The simple slope analyses used conditional values for sexual harassment frequency and traditional gender attitudes that were calculated to be one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). Simple slope analyses indicated that, for Black women, sexual harassment and PTS symptoms were more strongly related for women with less traditional gender attitudes (i.e., those with more feminist attitudes) than for those with more traditional gender attitudes. For White women, the trend was the opposite: sexual harassment and PTS symptoms were more strongly related for women with more traditional gender attitudes than for those with less traditional gender attitudes (i.e., more feminist attitudes). In other words, having less traditional, more feminist values seemed to be protective for White women, but not for Black women.

The model predicting symptoms of psychological distress is also presented in Table 2. The first block of variables accounted for 12% of the variance in clinical symptoms. Black women reported having fewer clinical symptoms of distress, consistent with our bivariate results. In addition, women with more traditional gender attitudes and women endorsing more frequent sexual harassment reported

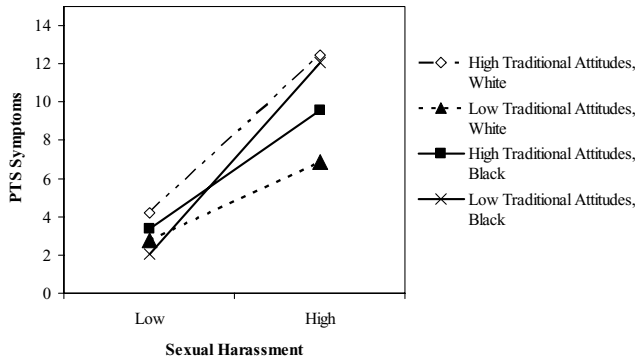
**Table 2**

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, Symptoms of Clinical Distress, and Satisfaction With Life ( $N = 232$ )

Variable	Posttraumatic stress symptoms			Symptoms of clinical distress			Satisfaction with life		
	$\Delta R^2$	$B(\beta)$	SE B	$\Delta R^2$	$B(\beta)$	SE B	$\Delta R^2$	$B(\beta)$	SE B
Step 1	.16**			.12**			.04†		
Year		-.75 (-.08)	.56		-.43 (-.03)	.86		-.28 (-.05)	.39
Race		1.11 (.05)	1.39		-6.85 (-.21)**	2.14		-1.09 (-.08)	.96
Traditional Gender Attitudes (TGA)		1.00 (.05)	1.24		3.80 (.13)*	1.91		-1.16 (-.09)	.86
Sexual Harassment (SH)		8.00 (.37)**	1.34		8.78 (.27)**	2.06		-1.71 (-.12)†	.93
Step 2	.04*			.03†			.01		
Race $\times$ TGA		-7.45 (-.23)**	2.57		-9.69 (-.20)*	3.96		2.13 (.10)	1.80
Race $\times$ SH		3.90 (.12)	2.77		-3.54 (-.07)	4.28		-.92 (-.04)	1.95
TGA $\times$ SH		-.59 (-.01)	2.73		.62 (.01)	4.22		1.53 (.06)	1.92
Step 3	.03**			.01†			.02*		
Race $\times$ TGA $\times$ SH		-16.93 (-.24)**	5.91		-17.15 (-.16)†	9.23		8.50 (.19)*	4.19
Total $R^2$	.23**			.16**			.07*		

Note. For Race: 0 = White, 1 = Black.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . † $p < .10$ .



**Fig. 1.** Posttraumatic stress symptoms as a function of level of sexual harassment, traditional gender attitudes, and race.

having more clinical distress. The variables entered in step two did not account for a significant additional portion of the variance, although there was a significant interaction between race and traditional gender attitudes. The three-way interaction term entered in step three was marginally significant. The results for this relationship were similar to those for PTS symptoms. Specifically (see Figure 2 and Table 3), for Black women, higher levels of sexual harassment were related to more clinical symptoms for women with less traditional gender attitudes (i.e., those with more feminist attitudes). However, sexual harassment and symptoms were not significantly related for Black women with more traditional gender attitudes. For White women, there was a stronger positive relationship between sexual harassment and clinical symptoms for women with more traditional gender attitudes than for women with less traditional gender attitudes.

Finally, Table 2 presents the findings for the hierarchical multiple regression with satisfaction with life as the dependent variable. The variables entered on steps one and two did not explain a significant portion of the variance in life satisfaction. However, the three-way interaction entered on step three was significant (see Figure 3 and Table 3). The results suggested that, for Black women, higher levels of sexual harassment were related to less satisfaction with life for women with less traditional gender attitudes (i.e., those

with more feminist attitudes); however, sexual harassment and life satisfaction were not significantly related for Black women with more traditional gender attitudes. For White women, the relationship between sexual harassment and life satisfaction did not depend on their level of traditional attitudes.

### DISCUSSION

The current study sought to replicate the relationship between sexual harassment and negative psychological outcomes in a sample of college students. Further, we attempted to identify two important moderators of this relationship: traditional gender attitudes and racial group membership. The data supported our predictions. The hypothesis that sexual harassment would be negatively related to psychological well-being was supported across three different measures of well-being. Students who experienced more sexual harassment were more likely to endorse symptoms of distress and PTS and to report less satisfaction with their lives overall than those reporting less sexual harassment. Further, our measure of PTS asked women to indicate their symptoms directly resulting from their sexual harassment experiences. Thus, we were able to demonstrate that sexual harassment has effects on trauma-specific outcomes as well as on a broad well-being indicator—life satisfaction. These results suggest that sexual harassment continues to be an important issue for women in colleges and universities and that such experiences work to the detriment of their psychological well-being. These results are particularly significant because the greater women’s distress resulting from sexual harassment, the greater the likelihood of other negative academic outcomes, including withdrawal from academic tasks, decreased classroom participation, changing majors, skipping classes, or leaving the institution altogether (Cortina et al., 1998; Paludi & Paludi, 2003). It should be noted that the lack of significant two-way interactions between race and sexual harassment predicting psychological well-being highlights the similarity among Black and White women in the negative consequences of sexual harassment.

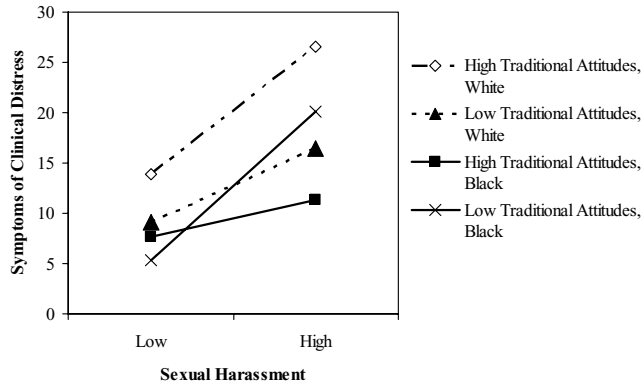
An additional hypothesis was that the relationship between sexual harassment and negative psychological

**Table 3**

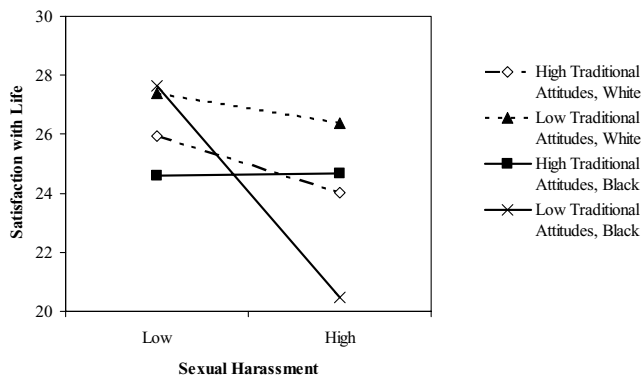
Simple Slope Analyses for Sexual Harassment Predicting Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, Clinical Symptoms and Satisfaction With Life

Variable		PTS symptoms		Clinical symptoms		Satisfaction with life	
Race	Traditional gender attitudes	B(B)	SE	B(B)	SE	B(B)	SE
White	High	8.94 (.44)**	2.16	13.68 (.37)**	4.07	-2.16 (-.15)	1.67
White	Low	4.47 (.22)*	1.94	7.92 (.21)*	3.66	-1.15 (-.08)	1.50
Black	High	6.73 (.29)*	3.02	4.03 (.16)	3.56	.15 (.01)	1.94
Black	Low	19.89 (.84)**	5.45	16.05 (.63)*	6.41	-7.85 (-.57)*	3.50

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . † $p < .10$ .



**Fig. 2.** Clinical symptoms as a function of level of sexual harassment, traditional gender attitudes, and race.



**Fig. 3.** Satisfaction with life as a function of level of sexual harassment, traditional gender attitudes, and race.

consequences would be moderated by traditional gender attitudes and that the nature of this moderation would differ for Black and White women. Our results supported this hypothesis. Specifically, we found that less traditional gender attitudes exacerbated the negative relationship between sexual harassment and psychological outcomes for Black women; however, they buffered this same relationship for White women. The one exception to this pattern was that gender attitudes did not moderate the relationship between sexual harassment and life satisfaction for White women.

One explanation for the difference in the direction of moderation of gender attitudes for Black and White women is that, for Black women, feminist, nontraditional gender attitudes may indicate a greater awareness of inequity among different groups in society. This awareness, or double consciousness, may be costly. Because Black women belong to multiple marginalized groups, they may feel personally impacted by multiple systems of inequity, that is, increased consciousness about gender-related issues may also result in increased consciousness about race-related difficulties and oppression, as well as consciousness about oppression that targets them on the basis of their race and gender intersection (Gay & Tate, 1998). For these women, sexual ha-

arrassment may increase feelings of being personally targeted and at risk of additional harassment, which may lead to the heightened negative effect on psychological well-being that we observed.

In contrast, White women may not experience the same double consciousness. Therefore, White women with more feminist attitudes may be able to attribute harassing experiences to gender-based societal injustices and, in doing so, protect themselves from some of the negative consequences of sexual harassment. Although, for White women, race is not a devalued identity, we do acknowledge that White women may have other identities or group memberships that are devalued, such as those based on sexual orientation or social class. However, because of the greater invisibility of these identities, as compared with race and gender, they may not result in the same type of double consciousness around oppression that Black women experience. Additionally, after harassment, White women may have greater access to legal and mental health resources than Black women. Feminist attitudes may encourage White women to take advantage of these resources and thus ultimately cope more effectively with sexually harassing experiences. On the other hand, Black women who have more feminist attitudes may be more skeptical and critical of attempting to remedy situations through legal recourse, grievances, or counseling.

Another possible reason why less traditional and more feminist attitudes were not protective for Black women's psychological well-being may be that gender was not their most salient or central identity. Instead, the "Black" or "Black woman" identities may be more salient for Black women, as has been suggested by other studies (Gay & Tate, 1998; Settles, 2006). Conversely, a feminist identity may have buffered the well-being of sexually harassed White women because it is connected to having a solidified personal identity, a sense of belonging with other women, or a sense of social support from other women (Thoits, 1983, 1987, 1991).

It might be that identification with other, more personally relevant groups or identities would buffer the well-being of Black sexually harassed women, as feminist identity did for White women. For example, placing importance on one's racial identity has been found to buffer Black men and women's well-being following racial discrimination (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). Similarly, Black women may embrace the womanist identity (Bowman et al., 2001; Walker, 1983), which incorporates multiple identity dimensions (e.g., race, gender, social class, sexual identity) and challenges oppression in these areas (Brown, 1989; Garth, 1994). As with racial identity, a womanist identity appears to be psychologically protective on a number of dimensions, such as self-esteem (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997) and life satisfaction (Constantine & Watt, 2002). Thus, it might prove fruitful for future research to examine the role of racial and womanist identities, or other types of feminist identities (e.g., liberal or

radical), in moderating the relationship between sexual harassment and well-being for Black women. Additional studies are also needed to replicate our observed racial differences in the moderation of sexual harassment and psychological outcomes by feminist versus traditional gender attitudes in a noncollege sample.

It is notable that Black women indicated more traditional gender attitudes on the Macho scale than White women. As a result of Black women's economic, career, and family obligations, they may hold beliefs that appear to be consistent with a more traditional, less feminist ideology (e.g., that women are responsible for their children's religious upbringing). However, Black women may simultaneously hold feminist beliefs around certain issues. For example, because Black women have always participated in the workforce, a common expectation is that women will be gainfully employed (Collins, 1989, 2000; hooks, 1989, 2000). Empirical support for these differences was found by Dugger (1988); Black women endorsed traditional and egalitarian feminist views in different domains than did White women. Further, the standardization of the Macho scale (Villemez & Touhey, 1977) did not examine differences between different racial groups. Low traditional attitudes on this scale may reflect feminist beliefs as they apply to White women, but they may not truly reflect Black women's attitudes toward feminist politics.

Other interesting findings emerged that were not central to our study. First, in our bivariate analyses, we found that gender attitudes and sexual harassment were unrelated among college women endorsing experiences of any sexual harassment. This finding is consistent with other studies that do not find a direct link between gender attitudes and recent harassment experiences (Fischer et al., 2000; Fischer & Good, 1994). However, because these data are cross-sectional, we cannot rule out the possibility that harassment leads to a rejection of traditional gender beliefs, as suggested by Downing and Roush (1985). In addition, we found that sexual harassment decreases for women the longer they are in college. This finding may be explained by the greater ability of upper-class women to select their classroom experiences, thereby avoiding courses that are male-dominated and instructors with reputations for sexual harassment. Further, the most severely harassed women may drop out of college as a result of their negative experiences and thus would not be represented in our sample.

There were several limitations of the present study that must be acknowledged. Although the use of a racially diverse sample is an important contribution to the literature, participants were not drawn from the entire university student population, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. Because participants were generally young college students, they had limited exposure to life experiences in which sexual harassment often occurs. Thus, the sexual harassment experiences of participants may not have been representative of the general population. Yet, the results do substantiate findings that sexual harassment exists for fe-

male students, similar to previous findings (Cortina et al., 1998; Paludi & Paludi, 2003; Shepela & Levesque, 1998).

Traditionally, studies have not explicitly examined sexual harassment experiences of Black women (notable exceptions include Buchanan, 2005; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1997; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Wyatt & Reiderle, 1995). Although we feel that the inclusion of Black women is a strength of this study, their historical exclusion from research raises issues of construct validity and measurement. For example, the SEQ has primarily been used to assess the sexual harassment experiences of White women. Some recent studies have used the scale with women of color and have found it to function similarly (e.g., Bergman & Drasgow, 2003; Buchanan et al., 2006; Cortina, 2001; Cortina & Watsi, 2005). However, the SEQ may not tap into all aspects of the sexual harassment experience; in particular, Black women may experience a unique form of sexual harassment—racialized sexual harassment—that is simultaneously based on their race and gender (Buchanan, 2005; Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Martin, 1994; Texiera, 2002). Future research should develop and utilize scales that assess this unique type of sexual harassment. Further, the fact that Black women reported lower levels of psychological distress than White women could also reflect limitations of the psychological distress measures for Black women in terms of construct validity and measurement. Studies have suggested that Black and White women express psychological distress differently, with White women reporting higher rates of depression and Black women endorsing higher rates of somatization (Franko et al., 2005; Zhang & Snowden, 1999). Thus, the difference we found may (a) be the result of measurement problems for these measures with Black women, (b) reflect more socially desirable responding by Black women, or (c) accurately reflect Black women's self-perception of less psychological distress relative to White women.

Populations of women in college represent an interesting group in which to study traditional and feminist gender attitudes because of their unique stage of gender identity development. On one hand, at this point in their life, they may have had fewer or less dramatic harassment experiences than older women. This less severe sexual harassment may not have provided an adequate crisis point to prompt feminist identity development, as has been suggested by Downing and Roush (1985). Conversely, college women, by virtue of their educational setting, may have had greater exposure to feminist ideas than less educated women. As a result, they may be more identified with feminist ideals than the general population. Given these issues, it is notable that we found gender attitudes to moderate sexual harassment and psychological outcome relationships.

Another limitation of the study was its correlational design, which does not permit us to make causal statements. Thus, it may be that sexual harassment is related to negative psychological outcomes because more distressed individuals are more likely to interpret ambiguous experiences negatively or as bothersome. Further, our data are based

on self-report data. As a result, we cannot rule out the possibility that the observed relationships were due to common method variance. However, our correlations demonstrated relationships of different strength, including several near-zero correlations, which argues against the likelihood that our results were due to mono-method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

The current study contributes to the extant literature in a number of ways. We replicated the relationship between sexual harassment and psychological outcomes in college women and found that this relationship was moderated by gender attitudes and race. Thus, race and gender attitudes appear to play an important role in how women respond psychologically to sexual harassment. In addition, it has been suggested that women high in traditional gender attitudes are less able to recognize and label sexual harassment experiences (Fischer et al., 2000). By using a behaviorally based measure of sexual harassment that does not require women to label their experiences as sexual harassment, we were able to observe the moderating effects of gender attitudes on sexual harassment experiences even if participants might not have labeled them as such. Finally, the study considers the influence of race, an area that has been neglected both in the literatures on traditional and feminist gender attitudes (Hansen, 2002; Vandiver, 2002) and sexual harassment outcomes (DeFour et al., 2003; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Shelton & Chavous, 1999). We found evidence of both similarities and differences in the sexual harassment experiences of Black and White women. Specifically, although both Black and White women's psychological well-being were negatively affected by sexual harassment, we found that more nontraditional, egalitarian feminist attitudes were protective for White women, whereas these same attitudes were a liability for Black women. Future work must build upon these results to better understand the unique interplay between race and gender attitudes in sexual harassment outcomes.

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