

The Impact of Gender and Feminism on the Perception of Sexual Harassment

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Introduction

Extensive research has been completed exploring the effects, risk factors, implications, and motives behind sexual harassment. However, little has been done to determine how different groups of people perceive sexually harassing behaviors.

Fischer, Tokar, Good, Hill & Blum (2000) found that women with more liberal feminist ideals tended to recognize a greater number of experiences as sexual harassment.

Other studies have found that women define sexually harassing behaviors more broadly than men (DeJudicibus & McCabe, 2001; Rodundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001).

The present study examines the effects of gender and feminist attitudes on perceived sexual harassment in a short video clip.

Methods

Participants: Approximately 1300 male and female students of diverse ethnic backgrounds at a large Midwestern university

Measure: Each participant took the 2006 College Experiences Survey, which measured their feminist attitudes (i.e. attitudes toward women) using the Feminist Perspectives Scale (Henley et al., 1998). Gender information was obtained as well.

Participants were also asked to rate the levels of sexual harassment they perceived in a short video clip that demonstrated the sexual harassment of a female employer by a male employee.

Table 1: Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables

*****	1.	2.	3.
1. Gender	--		
2. Feminist Attitudes	.19**	(.87)	
3. Appraisal of SH Video	.09**	.28**	(.80)
Mean	--	125.65	25.14
Standard Deviation	--	20.88	4.13

Note: Coefficient alphas are presented in parentheses. For Gender: 0 = Male, 1=Female. ** $p < .01$

Results Shown in Table 1

As expected, gender was positively correlated with feminist attitudes such that women were more likely to have liberal feminist attitudes. Men perceived less sexual harassment in the video. Feminist attitudes were positively correlated with appraisal of sexual harassment.



Figure 1: Video still

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables

Variable	ΔR^2	$B (\beta)$	$SE B$
Model 1	.01**		
Gender		.75 (.09)**	.23
Model 2	.07**		
Gender		.33 (.04)	.27
Feminist Attitudes		.05 (.27)**	.01
Model 3	.00		
Gender		.33 (.04)	.27
Feminist Attitudes		.06 (.30)**	.01
Appraisal of SH Video		-.00 (-.01)	.01
Total R²	.08		

Note: For Gender 0 = Male, 1=Female; ** $p < .01$

Results Shown in Table 2

Table 2 depicts the three models predicting the appraisal of sexual harassment in the video. Gender on its own accounted for a significant level of the variance in the dependent variable ($p > .01$). However, when the feminist variable was added gender became insignificant. Feminist attitudes were a strong predictor of perception of sexual harassment across all models.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study were slightly different than expected. When gender was considered independently of feminist attitudes, it showed a significant effect on the variance. However, when feminist attitudes and gender were considered together, gender was no longer significant.

People with attitudes higher in feminism were more likely to view the behaviors of the man in the video as sexually harassing. Men are lower in feminist attitudes than women and yet gender is not a moderating factor in the interaction between appraisal of sexual harassment and feminist attitudes.

Further research is needed to examine the characteristics that determine how people determine whether a particular behavior is sexual harassment.

The blatant sexual harassment that occurs in the video shown in this study and the inability of many of the participants to identify it as such means that further education is needed to inform the public about what sexual harassment looks like.

References

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