

African-American Women's Psychological Well-Being Following Cross-Racial Sexual Harassment

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Sexual Harassment: Definition, Prevalence, & Outcomes

- Definition of sexual harassment (SH)

- Three subtypes:

- Gender harassment
- Unwanted Sexual Attention
- Sexual Coercion

- 50% of women have experienced SH

(Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003)

- SH → negative health, work, and psychological outcomes.

(Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Rospenda, Richman, Ehmke, & Zlatoper, 2005)

Race & Sexual Harassment

- Few empirical studies to date.
- Preliminary findings:
 - Higher prevalence in Black women?
 - Minority women experience more severe SH
 - Perpetrator race influences perceptions of SH

Sexual Harassment and Black Women

- Relevant Contextual Factors
 - Historical context of slavery
 - Sexual assault of female slaves by their masters
(Adams, 1997)
 - Sexualized stereotypes
 - Jezebel image: hypersexual, present-day reminders, empirical evidence of their impact
(Ferguson, Berlin, Noles, Johnson, Reed, Spicer, 2005)
 - Double jeopardy
 - Increased risk of maltreatment for members of two devalued social groups: relevance of social dominance theory
(Shupe, Cortina, Ramos, Fitzgerald, & Salisbury, 2002)

Empirical Evidence of the Unique Experience of Black Women

- Higher Prevalence
 - Some inconsistencies exist within the literature.
(Frank, Brogan, & Schiffman, 1998; Kalof et al., 2001)
 - Mixed results may be due to underreporting
(Muliawan & Kleiner, 2001; Wyatt, 1990, 1992)
- Greater Severity of Harassing Behaviors
 - More likely to experience more physical forms and sexual propositions
(Frank, Brogan, & Schiffman, 1998; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982, 1986; Kalof et al., 2001)
- Racialized Sexual Harassment (Buchanan, 2005; Texiera, 2002)
 - Minority women report experiences of sexual harassment that target both their race and gender.

The Effect of Perpetrator Race

- Perpetrator Race & Perceptions of SH

Shelton & Chavous, 1999

- Among all participants

- Black target + Black perpetrator = more appropriate and humorous
- Black target + White perpetrator = more likely to receive the label of SH

- Among Black participants

- Black target + White perpetrator = tell a friend about the incident
- Black target + Black perpetrator = confront the harasser

The Current Study

- Purpose: To compare the outcomes of cross- and intra-racial SH
- Hypotheses
 - Cross-racial SH → more negative appraisal
 - Cross-racial SH → worse psychological outcomes

Methods

- Participants

- Sexually harassed Black women ($N = 53$)
 - Black Perpetrator ($n = 30$); White Perpetrator ($n = 23$)
 - Age: $M = 20.37$ ($SD = 1.89$)

- Procedure

- Administered 35-minute pencil and paper survey on “College Experiences”
- Psychological outcomes assessed before SH measure to reduce bias

Measures

- **Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ)**

(Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald et al., 1995)

- 16 items assessing experiences of unwanted sex-based behaviors during the past 12 months at school
 - e.g., “told suggestive stories”, “made unwanted attempts to fondle you”
- 5-point scale: 0 (*never*) to 4 (*many times*); $\alpha = .94$

- **Subjective Appraisal Scale** (Swan, 1997)

- 7 items assessing subjective appraisal of the experience
 - To what degree was the behavior “offensive”, “embarrassing”, etc.
- Responses given on a 5-point scale: 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*)
- $\alpha = .91 - .93$
(Swan, 1997)
- Higher score = more negative appraisal

Measures

- Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)

(Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983; Derogatis & Spencer, 1982)

- 31 items measuring the frequency of a variety of clinical symptoms within the past week
 - E.g. “faintness or dizziness”, “feeling fearful”, etc.
- Responses indicated on a 5-point scale that ranged from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*)
- Used the total score – GSI (a global measure of psychological distress)
- $\alpha = .71 - .85$ (Derogatis, 1993; Derogatis & Spencer, 1982)

Results

- **Subjective Appraisal**

- ANOVA ($F(1,50) = 3.45, MSE = 58.01, p < .10$)

- Marginally significant difference in how distressing participants found the experience.

- Cross-racial SH - $M = 14.26 (SD = 8.26)$

- Intra-racial SH - $M = 10.31 (SD = 7.07)$

Results

- **GSI: Psychological Distress**
 - ANOVA¹ ($F(1,51) = 4.78$, $MSE = 1.14$, $p < .05$)
 - Significant main effect for Perpetrator Race
 - Cross-racial SH - $M = 19.52$ ($SD = 16.46$)
 - Intra-racial SH - $M = 11.33$ ($SD = 10.09$)

¹ Perpetrator Race was treated as a between-subjects variable and BSI Symptom Type as a within-subjects factor using a Geisser-Greenhouse correction for all within-subjects tests.

Conclusions

- Cross-racial SH = significantly more psychological distress
 - ↑ Somatic complaints, anxiety, and depressive symptoms
- Cross-racial SH = marginally more negative appraisal
 - ↑ annoyed, offended, disturbed, threatened, embarrassed, upset, and frightened

Limitations

- Same method bias
- Cross-sectional
- College sample
- Small sample size
 - We are in the process of collecting more data to determine the generalizability of these findings.

Implications & Future Directions

- Separating the confounds of race and status
- The experience of cross- vs. intra-racial SH
 - Severity
 - Racially sexualizing behaviors
- Coping with cross- vs. intra-racial SH
- Black/White or In/Out- group driven?
- Strengthening current models of SH

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