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2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

F-35

Structure and Covariates of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Coercion

Symposium Chair: Judith Sims-Knight, PhD
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Although sexual harassment has been considered one of the most prevalent forms of sexual aggression (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009; Spitzberg, 1999), and extreme forms of such harassment have sometimes been considered equivalent to rape (Timmerman & Bajema, 1998), little research has directly addressed the issue of the nature of the relation between sexual harassment and sexual coercion. Moreover, because of the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace and the military, studies of harassment have focused more on sociological causes (e.g., organization climate, power differentials, institutional relationships), rather than on perpetrator characteristics (e.g., Lucero, Allen, & Middleton, 2006; Pina & Gannon, 2012), whereas sexual coercion, which is more often prosecuted as a criminal violation, has frequently been examined from an individual difference perspective (e.g., Knight & Sims-Knight, 2011).

Consequently, less is known about the perpetrator characteristics that covary with sexual harassment than is known about those that covary with sexual assault. The studies that have been done on individual differences among sexual harassers have, however, indicated that the males high the likelihood to engage in sexual harassment are also likely to be high on rape proclivity and on their endorsement of rape myths and adversarial sexual attitudes, to be more authoritarian, and to be more aggressive in general (Begany & Millburn, 2002; Lucero et al., 2006; Malamuth, 1981; Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992), suggesting substantial similarities among those identified as harassers and those identified as coercive.

In the past year or so the issue of the relation between harassment and coercion has become more salient and the need to understand their relation more pressing. Several powerful men have been fired when their history of sexual maltreatment of women was revealed (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). Some of them apparently raped women, but the behaviors of others could better be described as limited to sexual harassment. The “MeToo” phenomenon has made it clear that women perceive both sexual harassment and sexual assault as intrusive, frightening, and harmful. Relatively little research has, however, explored the basic issues: (a) are the associated factors that predict sexual coercion similar to or different from those that predict sexual harassment, and (b) are sexual assault and sexual harassment qualitatively different in kind or are they different levels of the same continuum? It is the purpose of this proposed symposium to explore these two issues in a large sample of university students.

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The first paper in the symposium explores the covariates of sexual coaxing, sexual harassment, and sexual coercion in a sample of university males and females. The second paper uses factor analysis, Item Response Theory, and taxometrics to examine the structural relation between harassment and coercion and explores the parallels of these to the agonistic continuum, a construct that captures the full range of coercive motivation in those who have sexually offended (Knight, Sims-Knight, & Guay, 2013).

What Does Sexual Harassment Mean for Each Gender?

Judith Sims-Knight, PhD

Bryan White

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

This paper addresses the question of whether sexual harassment has similar psychological meaning to sexual coercion. It explores whether they represent primarily a means to get sex or are primarily expressions of hostility and power. In a large sample of college students who took the MIDSA, the same variables that have been found to predict sexual coercion in offenders convicted of sexual assault (antisociality, callousness, emotional dysregulation, and sexualization) were found to predict sexual harassment in the same way they predict sexual coercion for both men and women. These results suggest that (a) sexual harassment and sexual coercion have similar psychological meaning, (b) they are correlated both with variables related to sexualization and to hostility, and (c) these conclusions hold for both men and women.

Learning Goals:

- Variables that are related to sexual coercion in incarcerated sex offenders also predict scores on sexual harassment.
- Sexual harassment works in the same way for men and women.
- Men who score high on sexual harassment tend to be low on romantic intimacy, but for women there is no relation.

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The Structure and Covariates of Sexual Harassment and Coercion

Raymond A. Knight, PhD
Brandeis University
Nicholas Longpré, PhD
Brandeis University
Jean-Pierre Guay, PhD
University of Montreal

This talk will explore whether sexual harassment should best be considered as the lower end of a continuum that ranges from verbal sexual comments through exhibitionism to attempted and completed sexual coercion, or whether it should be considered qualitatively different in kind from coercion. Three statistical techniques will be applied to a large sample of college students who took the MDSA and answered extensive questions about their harassing and coercive sexual behavior and also responded to items on the agonistic continuum. Factor analysis will identify whether the harassment and coercion can be described as a single factor or are better conceptualized as separate factors. Taxometric analyses will be calculated to explore whether there is any evidence that harassment and coercion are different in kind and represent non-arbitrary, different categories rather than being distributed along a continuum. Item Response Theory will be used to determine the ordering of behaviors along the dimension or dimensions that evolve from the first two sets of analyses and will determine whether the resultant dimension or dimensions can be described as probabilistic Guttman scales. We will then examine the covariation of the resultant measure(s) from all these analyses with the agonistic continuum, and discuss the implications of all the results for assessment.

Learning Goals:

- Illustrate whether sexual harassment and coercion are part of the same continuum or differ in kind.
- Show the ordering of behaviors along the scales that are identified.
- Illustrate that the likely harassment/coercion dimension is the behavioral manifestation of the agonistic continuum.

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Judith Sims-Knight, PhD, is Chancellor Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. She is a developmental psychologist who has studied the development of higher-order thinking and expertise for forty years. In the last fifteen years she has added a second line of research, exploring aggression, particularly sexual aggression, and bullying. She is the co-creator of the Multidimensional Inventory of Development, Sex, and Aggression (MIDSA). Her primary interests in this domain are the etiology and differentiation of various components of aggression and bullying, and in gender differences in aggression and sexual aggression.

Raymond Knight, PhD, has been researching sexual violence for more than four decades. Dr. Knight has published extensively on sexual aggression, psychopathy, and antisocial behavior. He is the co-creator of the Multidimensional Inventory of Development, Sex, and Aggression (MIDSA), which is the inventory that was used to generate the data for the

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proposed symposium. Dr. Knight's research interests involve the classification, etiology, and prognosis of psychopathology; risk assessment of sexually coercive males; and the efficacy of bullying interventions in the public school system.

Financial Interest Disclosure:

The data were gathered using the Multidimensional Inventory of Development, Sex, and Aggression (MIDSA). The data were collected in a research setting, but the instrument is also available commercially. Neither Judith Sims-Knight nor Raymond Knight, who developed the MIDSA) together, have received any financial remuneration from their involvement in the commercial product.