

## ***BLENDING VOICES. STRENGTHENING LIVES.***

2020 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 22 | 10:15 AM – 11:45 AM

**TH-AM-01**

### **Etiology, Structure, and Covariates of Sexual Coercion and Harassment**

Symposium Chair: Judith Sims-Knight, PhD  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

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; Quick & McFadyen, 2017), 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 males high in likelihood to sexually harass are also likely to (a) be high on rape proclivity, (b) endorse rape myths, (c) hold adversarial sexual attitudes, (d) be more authoritarian, and (e) be more aggressive in general (Begany & Millburn, 2002; Lucero et al., 2006; Malamuth, 1981; Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992). These results suggest substantial similarities among those identified as harassers and those identified as coercive. Both sexual harassment and sexually coercive behavior are statistically related to high sexualization, hostile sexuality, and general hostility toward women (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017; Diehl, Rees, & Bohner, 2018). Sims-Knight and Knight (2018) proffered an initial foray into the consideration of the structure and relation of these two constructs and documented the significant overlap in their structure and their developmental antecedents.

It is the purpose of this symposium to explore the relation between these two constructs in an expanded sample of university students ( $n > 700$ ). The expanded dataset allows for more powerful analyses like bi-factor analysis, and comparisons of males and females. The first presentation uses factor analysis, Item Response Theory, taxometrics, and bifactor analyses to examine the structural relation between harassment and coercion and explores in depth 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). The second presentation examines the etiological data generated for harassment and coercion in the context of a review of the major etiological models of sexual aggression against age-appropriate peers.

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### **The Structure, Etiology, and Covariates of Sexual Harassment and Coercion.**

Raymond A. Knight, PhD  
Brandeis University  
Nicholas Longpré, PhD  
Brandeis University  
Judith E. Sims-Knight, PhD  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

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 the expanded sample of college students who took the MIDSA 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 explore using bi-factor analysis the degree to which harassment, coercion, and the Agonistic Continuum share the same variance and whether unshared variance can be found and identified. The developmental correlates of each construct will be explored.

#### **Learning Goals**

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to define sexual harassment and sexual coercion and to delineate the reasons why they should be conceptualized as part of the same continuum rather than as differing in kind.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be able to describe the ordering in severity of the two constructs (harassment and coercion) along a single continuum.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able describe the Agonistic Continuum and to describe its relation to harassment.

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### **What Do the Sexual Harassment/Coercion Data Mean for Models of the Etiology of Sexual Aggression?**

Judith E. Sims-Knight, PhD  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth  
Raymond A. Knight, PhD  
Brandeis University

This talk addresses the theoretic issue of the shared and unshared variance of sexual harassment, sexual coercion, and agonistic motivation and the meaning of these data for etiological models. In light of the present etiological results on these constructs, the talk explores the relevance of these data to proposed etiological models of sexual aggression and assesses the validity and generalizability of these models. The clinical relevance of these results will be discussed as well.

#### **Learning Goals**

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand that variables related to sexual coercion in incarcerated sex offenders also predict scores on sexual harassment.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand that both men and women may exhibit sexual harassment.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to understand that men who score high on sexual harassment tend to be low on romantic intimacy, but for women there is no relation.

**Judith Sims-Knight, PhD** is Chancellor Professor of Psychology Emeritus 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), which is the inventory that was used to generate the data for the proposed symposium. 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). 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.

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