

## **Real Versus Imagined Gender Harassment**

**Julie A. Woodzicka\***

*Washington and Lee University*

**Marianne LaFrance**

*Yale University*

*Sexual harassment studies that use hypothetical situations and retrospective surveys may overestimate the degree to which victims actually confront their harassers. The result is that immediate emotional reactions are little understood and victims are often taken to task for nonconfrontational behavior. To address this neglect, we describe our experimental investigation of immediate reactions to sexually harassing questions encountered during a realistic job interview. Behavioral and emotional responses are compared to those in an imagined harassing interview. Results indicate that interviewees who are actually harassed react very differently than those who only imagine their responses. For example, imagined victims anticipate feeling angry but actual targets report being afraid. Anticipated behavior also did not mesh with actual behavior. Implications of these discrepancies for perceptions of “correct” ways to respond to harassment are examined.*

Sexual harassment victims are often blamed for their predicament (Cohen & Cohen, 1993). One reason for blame derives from the perception that the target failed to respond adequately to the alleged harassment (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995). Consider reactions to the widely publicized case of Anita Hill versus Clarence Thomas. In 1991, Hill, a professor of law at the University of Oklahoma, claimed to have been sexually harassed by Thomas, then a Supreme Court nominee. A frequent response was to question Hill’s credibility because she had not filed a formal complaint against Thomas at the time of the alleged incidents. In fact, many women asserted that they certainly would have reported the

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\*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Julie A. Woodzicka, Department of Psychology, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA 24450-0303 [e-mail: woodzickaj@wlu.edu].

harasser had they received similar treatment. Research with hypothetical harassment scenarios also finds that women believe that they would report or confront harassers (Baker, Terpstra, & Lartz, 1990; Terpstra & Baker, 1989). In actual cases, however, evidence suggests that women tend neither to report nor directly confront incidences of harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Gutek, 1985; Loy & Stewart, 1984).

Recognizing discrepancies between actual and anticipated responses to harassment may, however, be closely linked to understanding that harassment constitutes a situation and not merely an act. When sexual harassment is regarded only as unwanted actions, then the onus shifts to the victim to respond appropriately. The "reasonable woman" standard was the legal attempt to determine how a representative woman would react to sexual harassment (*Ellison v. Brady*, 1991). Juries likely have their own implicit standards for deciding whether a plaintiff's responses sufficiently conveyed that the sexual advances that were made were unwelcome. If juries and jurists believe that most women confront harassment, they may penalize women who do not, believing that this inaction demonstrates that no harm was done. One premise of the present research is that insufficient attention to the immediate harassing situation has tended to result in blaming the target rather than understanding what the effects are.

This form of victim blaming is in addition to placing the burden of remedying the harassing situation on the victim. For example, Waxman (1994) wrote in the *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* that the harassee must "learn: (a) to confront the harasser, (b) to share her/his feelings about the harassment, and (c) to tell the harasser, in very explicit terms, that she/he wants the harassing behavior to stop" (p. 244). In short, there may be unrealistic standards and expectations for how one should respond to harassment.

To address this issue, this article contrasts distal (imagined and retrospective) responses with proximal and actual responses to harassment. In the first section, we critically review the methods most frequently used to study responses to sexual harassment. Next, we describe the value of studying immediate emotional and non-verbal reactions to sexual harassment. These reactions have often been neglected, in part, because usual modes of data gathering have been hard pressed to objectively describe victims' responses. In the third section, we describe our efforts at assessing these more subtle and instant reactions. Specifically, we constructed a realistic job interview in which sexually harassing questions were asked by a male interviewer and compared the resulting reactions to a nonharassing interview. The aim is to understand more about what really happens when someone is harassed than about what should happen.

At a more general level, we are interested in understanding why there is a gap between women's imagined responses to discrimination and their actual responses. Social psychologists have a long-standing interest in examining why there is a disparity between how people think they will act in a particular situation

and what they actually do. This is especially relevant in the case of sexual harassment, because beliefs about how one would act likely form the backdrop for evaluating others' actions in the same situation. If one anticipates that one would confront or report a sexual harasser, then he or she is likely to be more critical of a person who fails to do likewise in the face of harassment. In addition, beliefs about how one would respond might lead to feelings of shame or guilt were one to look the other way when it actually happens.

### **Current Methods of Examining Responses to Sexual Harassment**

Researchers studying responses to sexual harassment have primarily relied on retrospective surveys and experimental analogues. The first relies on imperfect memory of real events; the second on precise measurement of pseudoevents.

#### *Retrospective Reports*

Survey methods ask participants to recall instances of harassment or elicit prior experiences with unwanted sexual behavior (e.g., Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997; Thacker, 1996; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981). In the first method, respondents are specifically asked whether they have been sexually harassed and if so, how they responded. As an example of the second and more indirect method, the behavioral-experiences method typically avoids using the term "sexual harassment" and asks participants instead about responses to encounters with various kinds of unwanted sexual-related behaviors.

Retrospective surveys, although useful in documenting the incidence and scope of sexual harassment, have some problems. For one, direct questions about harassment may elicit unreliable responses because of varied understanding of what constitutes the term "sexual harassment." For example, less than half of the women who endorse items on the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (a behavioral assessment of sexual harassment; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995) label their experiences as sexual harassment (Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999). Consequently surveys that use the term "sexual harassment" may exclude women who do not label their treatment as such. In addition, we know little about the effects of labeling a behavior as harassment. Perhaps those who think about harassment as such may confront harassing incidents more than those less inclined to characterize unwanted or hostile behavior this way. Consequently, direct questions may overestimate the degree to which reactions take the form of confronting the perpetrator.

A second problem is that retrospective reports may bias reports in the direction of overreporting of clear reactions to severe experiences (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995; Kidder, Lafleur, & Wells, 1995). Specifically, recall of severe incidents and

dramatic responses from the past may stand out in memory, whereas less severe incidents and/or less firm responses, such as adjustment to or avoidance of the harasser, may be harder to remember. Moreover, retrospective reporting may also distort recall in the direction of greater reporting of how one wished one had responded. For example, in a laboratory study that examined actual and desired responses to a specific encounter with sexism, Swim and Hyers (1999) found that 45% of women who thought about confrontational responses did not make any public verbal response.

### *Experimental Analogues*

Another way that responses to sexual harassment have been examined is through experimental analogue studies. Experimental analogues ask research participants to read vignettes describing instances of sexual harassment and indicate how they would respond if they were in that situation (e.g., Baker et al., 1990; Jones & Remland, 1992; Malovich & Stake, 1990; Perry, Kulik, & Schmidtke, 1997; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1993). In an attempt to increase external validity, some researchers have manipulated the mode of presentation. For example, Samoluk and Pretty (1994) asked participants to listen to audio simulations of sexual harassment and rate their likelihood of responding in a variety of ways.

Experimental analogues can assess responses to varying features of a harassing situation, such as the professional relationship between the harasser and target or the type and severity of the violation encountered by targets. However, participants' responses may not accurately reflect what they would actually do in response either because they do not know or they cannot say. Instead, experimental analogues may be assessing participants' beliefs about how targets *could* or *should* respond. In response to mistreatment, one could object or one should blow the whistle. Lengnick-Hall (1995), for one, has criticized the use of descriptive stimuli to study sexual harassment because reactions using that format are likely stronger and more assertive than those generated in a real harassing situation. Experimental analogues may thus overestimate confrontational responses or underestimate less direct responses such as withdrawing from the situation or diverting the attention or ignoring the harassment.

Fitzgerald et al. (1995) also argue that the usual paper-and-pencil measures used in analogue experiments do not adequately represent the personal threat experienced by targets of sexual harassment. In other words, experimental analogues likely fail to evoke the level of fear experienced in actual harassment. Sexual harassment, as many authors have noted, is typically not as much about innocuous sexual come-ons as it is about intimidation (Schultz, 1998). Targets of sexual harassment fear retaliation, reprisals, and even physical harm. Direct confrontation in such circumstances may engender even more retribution (Livingston, 1982). The more viable solutions to such intimidation may well be inattention or

diversion. According to Fitzgerald et al. (1995), analogue procedures “are *by definition* nonstressful and thus have little to say about the experiences and reactions of actual victims, are likely to be substantively misleading, and are vulnerable to being exploited for inappropriate purposes” (p. 126).

In sum, studies that rely on retrospective surveys and experimental analogues to study responses to sexual harassment may overestimate the likelihood of direct confrontation or the filing of official complaints. In so doing, such studies may contribute to normative conceptions about the normal or correct way to respond to harassment. In the next section, we address another side effect of such approaches, namely, an inadequate understanding of what actually happens when victims encounter gender harassment in the workplace.

### Overlooked Reactions to Sexual Harassment

As noted above, we are not the first to highlight the problems associated with experimental analogues and retrospective surveys to study the effects of sexual harassment. We are also concerned, however, that immediate emotional and psychological reactions have been neglected. Consequently, we focus on the more immediate responses to sexual harassment. Thus, although response options such as filing a formal complaint, quitting a job, and confronting, avoiding, or ignoring the harasser are important reactions to note, other on-line emotional, behavioral, and nonverbal responses are also significant. These responses may be instantaneous, may lie outside of conscious awareness, and may get more to the heart of what sexual harassment actually does to its victims.

Fitzgerald et al. (1995) describe “the silent tolerator” as a woman who “endures or tolerates harassment for some period of time, never speaking out publicly or reporting to management before leaving her job” (p. 131). Unfortunately, the courts have routinely found tolerance of harassment or inaction by the victim as indicating that the harasser’s behavior was not entirely unwelcome (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Apparent inaction at closer scrutiny may instead reveal not only that the behavior was unwelcome but that it was experienced as disparaging and threatening in a work context in which positive regard is crucial. To more fully understand how women deal with untenable hostile work environments, it is important to explore nonverbal behaviors because to be on the record with overt protest or complaint might only incur greater repercussions.

Nonetheless, just because one does not object when the harassment occurs does not mean that it is without psychological consequences. Sexual harassment has been associated with a variety of negative long-term outcomes (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Schneider et al., 1997; Tong, 1984), but the nature of immediate and short-term effects are unknown. For example, findings about how harassment affects mood would be useful because temporary mood states have been shown to affect performance (Lynton & Salovey, 1997), interpretations of feedback (Hammer &

Stone-Romero, 1997), self-concept (DeSteno & Salovey, 1997), memory (Singer & Salovey, 1988), and resistance to persuasion (Wegener & Petty, 1996). In short, immediate emotional responses induced by sexual harassment may have an impact on many spheres of the target's work and interpersonal relationships.

Investigation of the emotional responses associated with harassment might also lead to a better understanding of what really constitutes a hostile working environment. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) proposed that paper-and-pencil measures do not evoke the stress inherent in actual instances of harassment. Nor do they usually capture the complexity of being betrayed in a place from which one cannot easily leave. Imagined as opposed to actual harassment likely underestimates the fear involved. Imagined as opposed to actual harassment also likely underestimates the calculation of costs and benefits associated with taking direct action that might on the surface look like inaction. Consequently, imagined harassment is more likely to engender feelings of anger and anticipated action.

We are not suggesting that experimental analogues and retrospective surveys should not be used in studies of sexual harassment. Rather, our goal is to better understand the range of consequences that sexual harassment produces. In the current research we use both an experimental analogue and a realistic situation to expand our understanding of how women think they will respond to harassment and how they actually do. In our program of research, we sought to create a realistic harassment situation in which we could examine spontaneous nonverbal emotional reactions along with more typical self-report and behavioral measures. These responses would then be compared to those of women who only imagined the same treatment.

### **Study 1: Examining Imagined Responses to Harassment**

To contrast how women imagine responding, we created a written scenario describing a sexually harassing job interview. Participants were asked to imagine themselves as the target and to consider how they would feel and what actions they would take in the face of harassment.

#### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* One hundred ninety seven female respondents (ages 18–21; average age 19 years) were asked to read the following scenario:

Imagine that you are interviewing for a research assistant position. You are being interviewed by a male (age 32) in an office on campus. Below are several of the questions that he asks you during the course of the interview. Please read each question and indicate how you would respond and feel. *Write how you think you would react, not how you think you should react.* Indicate how you would actually behave, think, and/or feel.

After reading the scenario, respondents were asked to anticipate how they would feel and respond to each of the following three questions: (1) Do you have a boyfriend?

(2) Do people find you desirable? (3) Do you think it is important for women to wear bras to work? These questions were pretested as sexually harassing (a detailed description of the pretesting is provided below).

### *Results and Discussion*

As predicted, most of the respondents imagined that they would confront the harasser. The majority (62%) anticipated that they would either ask the interviewer why he had asked the question or tell him that it was inappropriate. Further, over one quarter of the participants (28%) indicated that they would take more drastic measures by either leaving the interview or rudely confronting the interviewer. Notably, a large number of respondents (68%) indicated that they would refuse to answer at least one of the three harassing questions.

These imagined responses are not surprising considering that anger was the most prominent emotion reported by women anticipating harassing questions. Twenty seven percent of respondents indicated that they would feel angry if asked the harassing questions during an interview. Feelings of anger were reported more commonly than those of fear. Only 2% of respondents imagined feeling afraid following the harassing questions. Further, anger, but not fear, was significantly associated with confronting,  $r(197) = .23, p < .05$ .

When imagining harassment, women believe that they would feel angry and would react by directly challenging the treatment. This finding is consistent with results from other analogue studies of harassment and opinion polls regarding the “correct” way to respond. That people believe their feelings and attitudes are predictive of their behavior is well-established (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). This may be especially true for feelings of anger. It has been proposed that anger prepares one for action (e.g., Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986) and that the particular action is one of attack (Lazarus, 1991). For women imagining anger in response to harassment, the only seemingly plausible reaction may be confrontation.

### **Study 2: Creating Sexual Harassment in the Lab**

We decided that to study actual reactions to harassment, we would need to create a situation in which harassment occurred and contrast that with an identical nonharassing situation. This was no easy task. On ethical grounds alone we could not create a situation in which severe harassment occurred. However, it was imperative that a real harassing situation be created. Further, if we were to assess the actual effects of harassment, our participants could not be aware that they were in a study. Taking these factors into account, we devised a job interview in which a male interviewer asked female job applicants sexually harassing questions interspersed with more typical questions asked in such contexts.

### *Method*

*Participants.* Fifty women (ages 18–39; mean age = 22 years) volunteered to participate in an interview described as determining eligibility for a research assistant job. Participants were recruited by posters and by advertisements placed in local and school newspapers.

*Interviewers and interview questions.* Three males in their early 30s served as interviewers in this study. To ensure that participants would not know or recognize the interviewers, they were recruited from off-campus locations. Interviewers dressed similarly for each interview: dress pants and a shirt or sweater. Interviewers received training in both verbal (asking the questions) and nonverbal (eye contact, smiling) behavior and, after an initial handshake, did not touch the interviewee.

Interview questions were devised to fulfill a number of criteria. First and foremost we wanted a set of questions whose content would be sexually harassing in a job interview context, such as asking respondents about their romantic relationships. We also needed a matched set of non-sexually harassing questions, questions that might be surprising to encounter in a job interview.

Pretesting was conducted to select the relevant questions. Specifically, 28 job interview-type questions were devised that contained sexual content and 28 non-sexually loaded questions of the same form and type were given to 39 female respondents. They were asked to rate each question on two dimensions: the degree to which they perceived it as sexually harassing and the degree to which they perceived it to be surprising to encounter in a job interview. Ratings were made on 5-point scales. The goal was to select questions that would be comparably surprising but not comparable on the sexual harassment dimension. This was done in order to separate the effects of sexual harassment on job interviewees from the reactions at being asked strange or inexplicable questions during a job interview.

On the basis of both ratings, a set of three sexually harassing questions was matched with three non-harassing questions in their degree of rated surprise. The three sexually harassing questions were (1) Do you have a boyfriend? (2) Do people find you desirable? and (3) Do you think it is important for women to wear bras to work? These sexually harassing questions were matched with the following nonharassing but comparably surprising questions: (1) Do you have a best friend? (2) Do people find you morbid? and (3) Do you think it is important for people to believe in God? The three sexually harassing questions or the three nonharassing matches were interspersed with 13 standard interview questions, such as What do you like about research? and What jobs or volunteer experience have you had?

*Procedure.* Upon arrival, participants were randomly assigned to either the sexually harassing or nonharassing interview. Participants in each condition were

asked the same questions except for the three experimental and control questions. Both harassing and nonharassing interviews followed the same order and format, and interviewers were unaware of the type of interview until they asked either the first sexually harassing question or the nonharassing match. All interviews took place in an office in the psychology department and were videotaped by a covert camera.

After the interview, participants were escorted by a female assistant to a classroom where they completed Watson, Clark, and Tellegen's (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)–Brief Form. The PANAS asks participants to rate the congruency of their present mood with 10 high-arousal positive mood words and 10 high-arousal negative mood words on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*extremely*). Interest in several other moods prompted the addition of the following eight affect words: angry, disappointed, alienated, confident, happy, disgusted, surprised, and humiliated. Participants were then fully debriefed and given an opportunity to withdraw their self-report and video data from the study. One subject in the harassing interview condition asked that her videotaped interview be erased; this was done.

Two raters coded the verbal and behavioral responses immediately following the experimental questions as well as additional spontaneous input by interviewees at the end of the interview. The following categories were created to describe the behavioral reactions: ignore (interviewee takes no overt stand on being asked the question and answers it), refocus (interpret question as legitimate, such as responding to “Do people find you desirable?” with “Desirable? In what way?” or “Desirable as a person, right?”), positive counter (ask why the question was asked), negative counter (aggressively question the legitimacy of the question), leave, and report incident to experimenter.

Emotional reactions were assessed via both self-report and facial expression. Self-reported mood was measured by the PANAS, and facial expressions were coded with the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1978). Two coders certified in FACS coded frequency, duration, onset, and offset and for all action units (AUs) for a total of 6 s, beginning 1 s prior to the end of each sexually harassing question or nonharassing match. This period was chosen to capture most facial expression associated with a particular question.

### *Results and Discussion*

*Actual responses to harassment.* The results illuminated what targets of harassment do *not* do. First, no one refused to answer: Interviewees answered every question irrespective of whether it was harassing or nonharassing. Second, among those asked the harassing questions, few responded with any form of confrontation or repudiation. Nonetheless, the responses revealed a variety of ways that respondents attempted to circumvent the situation posed by harassing questions. Whereas

a majority of the interviewees (52%) ignored the harassment—that is, they literally responded to the question as asked—a significant proportion of interviewees (36%) politely asked the interviewer why he asked the question. The scripted answer by the interviewer was “I was wondering, so I thought I would ask.”

It should be noted, however, that of those targets taking the tack of asking about why the question was asked, 80% did so only at the end of the interview rather than immediately following the offensive query. That is, at the moment that the question was asked, respondents replied to its manifest content. Only at the conclusion of the interview, when they were given the opportunity to pose any questions they had, did they ask about the troubling questions. The third most common response was to refocus the question by asking for clarification. No one negatively challenged the interviewer when he asked the harassing questions, nor did anyone leave or report the interviewer’s behavior to a supervisor.

That a majority of interviewees ignored the harassing content is not particularly surprising. Many researchers note that the most common initial response is to ignore the harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gutek, 1985; Loy & Stewart, 1984). What was noteworthy is the refocus strategy used by a fifth of the respondents. These women attempted to redefine the situation by requesting the interviewer to be more explicit about what he was asking. At one level, such a refocus strategy appeared to be used in the service of preventing possible miscommunication. If they had misunderstood the intent of the question, then by asking for clarification they could avoid responding inappropriately. Another possibility, however, is that in asking the interviewer to clarify his intent in asking the question, they required him to be explicit about his motives. Whatever the intent behind asking for clarification, the strategy allowed targets to bracket the question as strange or irrelevant even while continuing to take the interview seriously. Viewed this way, it is not surprising that no one left the interview, became hostile, or refused to answer questions. Any of these strategies would have foreclosed any opportunity of getting the research position to which they had applied.

Responses from targets of actual sexual harassment have little in common with responses to imagined harassment discussed earlier. Recall that 68% of the participants who imagined the sexually harassing questions being asked in the context of a job interview indicated that they would refuse to answer at least one of the sexually harassing questions. *Not one* of the actual interviewees refused to answer any of the questions. Further, whereas over a fourth of respondents imagined telling the interviewer off or leaving the interview, no one actually did this. The predominant response from women in the imagined harassing condition was positive countering, but in the actual interview it was to do nothing but answer the question. Table 1 summarizes both imagined and actual responses to the sexually harassing interview questions.

This divergence between anticipated responses and actual reactions is reminiscent of Milgram’s (1963, 1974) early work on obedience. When Milgram

**Table 1.** Percentage of Imagined and Actual Responses to Sexually Harassing Interview Questions

Responses	Imagined ( <i>n</i> = 197)	Actual ( <i>n</i> = 25)
Ignore/Do nothing	32	52
Refocus	6	20
Positive counter	62	40
Ask why + answer	15	36 <sup>a</sup>
Ask why + no answer	26	0
State question is irrelevant	21	4
Negative counter	12	0
“Tell off”	7	0
“None of your business”	5	0
Leave interview	16	0
Report to supervisor	6	0
Refuse to answer at least one question	68	0

*Note.* Percentages exceed 100 because some participants responded in multiple ways.

<sup>a</sup>80% of these responses occurred after the interview during an informal question and answer period, not during the interview.

(1974) asked intelligent, educated individuals to anticipate how most people would behave in situations in which they were ordered to inflict harm, they predicted that the majority would disobey. When actually placed in that situation, however, the opposite proved true (Milgram, 1963). These classic studies highlighted the chasm that continues to exist between how people think they will respond to a stressful event and how they actually do.

What accounts for the large discrepancy between imagined and actual responses? The data on participants' self-reported emotional reactions provide a clue. Simply put, women imagined feeling angry, but women in the situation were actually afraid. Recall that over a quarter of respondents in the imaginary harassing condition reported that they would feel angry if asked the harassing questions, whereas only 2% imagined feeling afraid. The feelings of the women who actually encountered harassment were very different. Instead of a very few reporting being afraid, 40% of actual targets described some level of fear. Instead of feeling outraged, only 16% of actual targets reported being angry.

It is noteworthy that the self-reports of being afraid were not due merely to actually being in an interview situation in contrast to an imagined interview situation. For when we compared interviewees in the sexually harassing interview to those who got the surprising but nonharassing questions, we found that women who were asked harassing questions reported feeling significantly more afraid than did their nonharassed counterparts,  $t(48) = 2.33, p < .05, r = .32$ .

Recall that Fitzgerald et al. (1995) argued that experimental analogue studies are uninformative because they do not elicit the fear of actual harassment. The results obtained here clearly support such thinking. When asked to imagine how

they would react in a harassing situation, it appears that women do not consider the possibility of feeling afraid. Instead, they can easily imagine being angry.

We also correlated the association between feelings and actions. In the harassing interview, fear was negatively correlated with confronting the harasser. As self-reported fear increased, the likelihood of confronting significantly decreased,  $r(25) = -.40, p < .05$ . Self-reported anger, however, was not associated with confronting,  $r(25) = .05, p > .10$ . This suggests the interesting possibility that it is fear (or lack thereof) rather than outrage that predicts confrontation. Remember that this relationship was not present in the analogue study. Rather, anticipated imagined anger and imagined confrontation were substantially connected.

The correlations between emotion and behavior indicate why analogue studies may overestimate the occurrence of confrontation to sexual harassment. Experimental analogues portray anger as the prominent emotion in reaction to sexual harassment. Instead, we find that fear is more salient. Moreover, the greater the degree to which fear is salient the less likely it is that targets challenge the offending behavior directed at them. Perhaps if juries and jurists better understood the intimidation created by sexual harassment, they might be less likely to blame women who do not respond directly to the harasser.

*Nonverbal reactions to actual harassment.* Affective reactions were also assessed by noting changes in facial expressions during the time interviewees answered either harassing or nonharassing questions. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the facial AUs displayed in both conditions.

The most remarkable facial reaction to harassment was smiling, although the type of smile displayed clearly indicated that enjoyment was not the underlying affective state. The FACS system distinguishes numerous smile types (Ekman & Friesen, 1978). Specifically, smiles that indicate the presence of positive emotion

**Table 2.** Occurrence of Facial Action Units (AUs) by Harassment Condition

Action unit	Percentage displaying AU		Mean total duration (s)			
	Harassed <i>n</i> = 23	Not harassed <i>n</i> = 24	Harassed		Not harassed	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
12 (non-Duchenne smiles)	96	96	6.37	3.39	4.77	3.01
6+12 (Duchenne smiles)	65	70	3.35	3.68	3.24	3.29
1+2 (brow raise)	56	33	.91	1.25	1.13	2.09
4 (brow furrow)	26	17	.65	1.53	.10	.28
15 (lip corner pull)	13	12	.11	.40	.07	.22
17 (chin boss raise)	35	42	.47	.80	.48	.79
15+17	9	13	.11	.46	.07	.22
14 (dimple)	13	21	.17	.53	.27	.74
20 (lip stretch)	13	4	.08	.27	.02	.11
24 (lip tighten)	28	20	.15	.34	.04	.21
28 or 32 (lip suck or bite)	20	8	.13	.34	.16	.55

*Note.* Only AUs displayed by at least two participants are presented.

look different from smiles that do not. Positive-emotion smiles, termed Duchenne smiles, involve two facial actions, one is observed when the lip corners are pulled up and back and another facial action which is observed by the cheeks being raised causing wrinkles to form at the outer corners of the eyes. Non-Duchenne smiles, on the other hand, only involve mouth movement and show no relationship to positive feelings (Ekman, Friesen, & Ancoli, 1980). In response to the sexually harassing questions, female job interviewees smiled but the smiling was more of the non-Duchenne than the Duchenne type (96% vs. 65%).

Harassed interviewees also evidenced more non-Duchenne smiling than did nonharassed interviewees,  $t(45) = 2.02, p < .05, r = .29$ . Why would sexually harassed interviewees smile at all, even if it is only a nonfelt smile? That harassed women displayed more non-Duchenne smiling than did nonharassed women may seem counterintuitive at first glance. This finding makes good sense, however, when we consider that non-Duchenne smiling is not necessarily indicative of positive feelings (Ekman et al., 1980). Rather, this type of smiling suggests accommodation or appeasement. Hecht and LaFrance (1998) have proposed that in dyadic relationships, low-power people are obliged to smile regardless of how positive they feel. The harassed interviewees were in a low-power position not only because the interviewer was the gateway to a desired job but also because he injected notions of sexuality and paternalism into the interview. Thus, non-Duchenne smiling by harassed women may have been a way of signaling, not pleasure at the unwelcome intrusion, but that they were willing to play by the rules so that they could get out of that place.

Targets of prejudice have historically been viewed as inactive agents who are unable to impact their surroundings effectively (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1996). Recently, however, they have been gaining more attention as causal agents who effectively negotiate their environments (e.g., Swim & Stangor, 1998). The present research adds to this literature by examining the subtle ways that targets impact a harassing situation. Women experiencing harassing questions likely weigh the costs and benefits of directly confronting the perpetrator in much the same way that African Americans decide which instances of everyday racism will be ignored and which deserve action. In this light, targets of harassment should be viewed as active agents who make choices about when to challenge, confront, or ignore prejudice.

## Conclusion

It has been estimated that the target of sexual harassment is blamed or that the harassing event is denied in approximately 80% of sexual harassment cases (Cohen & Cohen, 1993). The discrepancy between imagined and actual reactions to harassment speaks volumes about why targets of harassment are frequently blamed for their inaction. In sum, it appears that when imagining scenarios of harassment, women operate on the assumption that if they are sexually harassed, they will feel

angry and be confrontative. This folk theory has serious implications for those who fail to confront. Women who do not actively confront harassers may be regarded critically by those who hold their own anticipated response as the standard to which all other responses must be compared.

The current study enabled us to directly view the ways that women immediately respond to and deal with harassment. We found that most targets did not confront the harasser. Even those who did accomplished it by being polite and respectful. This allowed them to express some concern with the questions without jeopardizing their chances for employment. Our findings also explain why most women do not confront. The reason has little to do with welcoming the harassment or complacency. Rather, fear may impede more assertive responses.

Although experimental analogues and retrospective surveys provide important information about how women think they should respond and how they remember responding, they may overestimate rates of confronting compared with actual experience. Reliance on these methods may also miss complex emotional reactions that are directly linked to short-term and long-term responses. We advocate the use of multiple modes of investigating feelings and responses to sexual harassment. Realistic experimental harassment paradigms, diary studies, and structured interviews of harassment victims coupled with retrospective survey data would paint a more accurate picture of women's reactions to sexual harassment. Continued understanding of women's emotional reactions to harassment and public acknowledgment of how most women actually respond to harassment would help alleviate some of the stigma associated with being a target of harassment.

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JULIE A. WOODZICKA recently received her PhD in Social Psychology from Boston College. She is an assistant professor in the Psychology Department at Washington and Lee University. Her research focuses on the impact of everyday instances of prejudice such as that conveyed through sexist jokes and subtle sexual harassment.

MARIANNE LAFRANCE is Professor of Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies at Yale University. She received her MA and PhD from Boston University. She is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the American Psychological Society and has served in a number of capacities for SPSSI including serving as APA Program Chair on two occasions and Chair of Grants-In-Aid Fund. Her interests are at the intersections of gender, power and nonverbal communication.