The Relationship Between Assertiveness and Individual Response to Sexual Harassment

in the Workplace

by

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a pressing issue for both employees and employers. There have been studies that examine individual factors that influence how targets of sexual harassment react to the harassment incident. The present study seeks to contribute to the literature by exploring the effects of assertiveness on individuals' responses to sexual harassment in the workplace, a topic that has not received significant research attention so far. Specifically, this study examines whether two forms of assertiveness (i.e., adaptive and aggressive assertiveness) predict how individuals respond to sexual harassment in the workplace (i.e., passive, avoidance, or active response). Data were collected from 213 participants, consisting of students, faculty, and staff at a large, public, southern university via an online survey. Four demographic variables (i.e., gender, ethnicity, age, and primary affiliation with the university) were used as covariates in the analysis. Using multinomial logistic regression analysis, adaptive and aggressive assertiveness were not found to be statistically significant predictors of sexual harassment response category. The overall prediction accuracy was 48.3%, with correct prediction rates of 38.6%, 0%, and 79.8% for passive, avoidance, and active response, respectively. Implications of the study findings and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The act of imposing unwanted sexual relations on subordinates by superiors at work has been around for centuries (Siegel, 2003). In particular, slave women were victims of sexual coercion by their masters (Siegel, 2003). Things did not significantly improve after emancipation as working-class women, especially African American women, continued to be sexually exploited by higher-class men (Siegel, 2003). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was common for young women working in domestic service to experience unwanted sexual advances by men in the households they worked in (Siegel, 2003). Around the same time, female workers in manufacturing and clerical positions were faced with sexual harassment incidents ranging from inappropriate verbal remarks and deliberate touching to life-threatening sexual assault (McCaghy, 1983; Siegel, 2003). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, in which Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (McDonald, 2012). Catharine MacKinnon has been credited for recognizing and publicizing sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination, violating Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a result, sexual harassment became a socio-legal phenomenon in the 1970s and has generated a substantial amount of research since then (Baker, 2004). Research on sexual harassment over the past few decades has provided insights into its definitions, prevalence, associated behaviors, causes and outcomes, characteristics of harassers and victims, and its impact on organizations (e.g., McDonald, 2012). Other areas that have received research attention include how individuals respond to sexual harassment and factors that push them to confront and/or report harassment behaviors (e.g., Adams-Roy

& Barling, 1998; Butler & Chung-Yan, 2011). What makes a person stand up to a harasser is a complicated question to answer because there is a multitude of variables that need to be considered, such as personal characteristics, history, experience with sexual harassment, the relationship with the harasser, nature of the job and the industry, organizational culture, and the organization's policies, among many others. Of these factors, Adams-Roy and Barling (1998) found that assertiveness predicted a woman's likelihood to confront the harasser. Similarly, Brecklin and Ullman (2005) indicated that women who successfully resisted rape attempts were more assertive and confident. Despite these findings, there is still limited research that specifically looks at the linkage between assertiveness and sexual harassment response. Therefore, the present study aims to empirically examine the effect of assertiveness on how individuals respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature on Sexual Harassment

Definitions of Sexual Harassment

As a psychological construct, Fitzgerald et al. (1997) defined sexual harassment as "unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding [his/her] resources, or threatening [his/her] well-being." They proposed a framework that categorized sexual harassment behavior into three distinct dimensions: sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment. Gender harassment refers to verbal or nonverbal behaviors that intend to be insulting, degrading, and hostile towards the target. Examples of gender harassment would be crude and offensive remarks, sexual slurs and gestures, and displays of pornographic materials. Unwanted sexual attention refers to behaviors that are offensive, unwanted, and unreciprocated. Repeated requests for dates despite rejection, deliberate touching, and attempts to discuss sex are some examples of this dimension. Lastly, sexual coercion is defined as using sexual acts in exchange for job-related considerations. Promising a promotion in return for sex or experiencing negative consequences for refusing a sexual request would be considered sexual coercion.

Because sexual harassment is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (EEOC, 1990), it is important to understand the construct from a legal perspective. According to the EEOC guidelines, sexual harassment consists of two types: quid pro quo and hostile environment. Quid pro quo involves unwelcome sexual conduct by a manager or supervisor that results in a tangible employment action, such as discipline, firing, or denial of promotion (EEOC, 1990). Generally, this form of sexual harassment

corresponds with the sexual coercion dimension of Fitzgerald et al. (1997) framework. On the other hand, hostile environment harassment describes unwelcome verbal and/or physical sexual conduct, creating an abusive or hostile work environment (EEOC, 1990). For the harassment to violate Title VII, it must be severe or pervasive enough to significantly affect the victim's work conditions and create an abusive working environment (EEOC, 1990).

Theories of Sexual Harassment

Several theoretical perspectives have been proposed to explain and predict sexual harassment in organizations. McDonald (2012) discusses three major perspectives: the natural-biological model, sociocultural theories, and legal consciousness theories.

The Natural-Biological Model. The first perspective, proposed by Berdahl (2007), is the natural-biological model. It states that sexual harassment results from the natural and inevitable sexual desire by men towards women. According to this theory, sexual harassment is not discriminatory or sexist, and thus, is not considered harassment. This model has been mostly criticized and dismissed because it lacks empirical evidence and fails to provide sufficient explanation for same-sex harassment and lower-status men and higher-power women harassment (Foote & Goodman-Delahunty, 2005).

The Sociocultural Theories. The second perspective of sexual harassment is the sociocultural theories, which have received more attention and recognition. Gutek and Morasch (1982) proposed that sexual harassment of women in the workplace was the result of sex-role spillover. It is defined as "the carryover into the workplace of gender-based expectations for behavior that are irrelevant or inappropriate to work," and is believed to occur when the sex ratio is skewed in either direction. Therefore, in male-

dominated workplaces, where masculine qualities such as toughness, competitiveness, dominance, and aggressiveness are the norm, feminine characteristics that deviate from that norm are perceived as disruptive, and women are seen as intruders (Vogt et al., 2007). As a result, a woman's sex-role becomes more salient than her work role, facilitating the occurrence of sexual harassment (Bergman & Henning, 2008). However, the evidence linking the relationship between occupational sex ratio and sexual harassment has been contradictory. Since most studies of sex-role spillover use job gender ratios to represent sex roles (Welsh, 1999), the sex-role spillover explanation for why sexual harassment occurs is fundamentally flawed. Another theory in the sociocultural category is the power model, which states that sexual harassment arises from men's economic power over women, allowing them to exploit and coerce women sexually (MacKinnon, 1979; Zalk, 1990). Yet, this theory still fails to explain sexual harassment from peers and juniors, which can be more common than harassment from supervisors (Brant & Too, 1994). It could be that the "power" in this model refers to a perceived power between the harasser and the target, rather than an explicit form of economic power.

The Legal Consciousness Theories. The third perspective of sexual harassment is referred to as legal consciousness theories, which address employees' perceptions of sexual harassment behaviors and their reactions to the harassment (Blackstone et al., 2009). The process through which employees interpret behaviors as sexual harassment and report the incident is informed by legal consciousness and referred to as "naming, blaming, claiming" (Felstiner et al., 1980– 1981). Specifically, naming describes the interpretation of a behavior or situation as harassment. Blaming is holding someone

accountable for the damage caused by the harassment. Claiming refers to reporting or confronting the harasser. Cairns (1997) discussed some reasons why some women stay silent after experiencing sexual harassment. First, women are seen as "other" to a socialized male norm and as a result, have learned to put less emphasis on personal agency. Because of that, women are likely to convince themselves that their experiences are not real, or that they are to blame for the harassment. On top of that, some women use silence as a form of resistance and refusal to participate. However, the ideas proposed by Cairns (1997) might be outdated since younger women who grew up in the age of "backlash rhetoric and politics" tend to distance themselves from the portrayal of feminists in the media as well as a divisive and women-targeting social movement (Wear et al., 2007). Additionally, Hunter (2002) finds that it is increasingly common for women to constitute themselves as non-gendered, non-embodied, and opposite to the conventional feminine image. These trends were further illustrated by the third-wave feminism movement (Henry, 2010) and led to a backlash that was often used to discredit the struggle for equal rights and sexual harassment against women (Hayes, 2004; Mahood & Littlewood, 1997).

       The Antecedents and Consequences Framework. Lastly, a highly recognized and influential contributor to the sexual harassment literature is the antecedents and consequences of the sexual harassment framework proposed by Fitzgerald et al. (1997). In this framework, sexual harassment was studied at a group culture level and an organizational climate level. According to the framework, sexual harassment is predicted by the organizational climate and job gender context. Naylor et al. (1980) describe organizational climate as the organization's characteristics that communicate the

tolerance for sexual harassment. Job gender context, on the other hand, refers to the gendered nature of the workgroup such as the sex ratio and the type of job (e.g., firefighter as a male-dominated job) (Gutek et al., 1990). Empirical results showed that sexual harassment has a direct negative impact on job satisfaction and psychological conditions. Sexual harassment also had an indirect effect on health-related outcomes via psychological conditions. Specifically, psychological outcomes included stress, anxiety, and depression, while health-related outcomes referred to headaches and sleep issues. Moreover, job satisfaction was negatively related to job withdrawal, which was consistent with previous research findings.

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

A sizeable amount of research has focused on measuring the prevalence of sexual harassment across various industries and with different methodologies. Some notable statistics will be discussed in this section. According to (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.), there were a total of 7,514 sexual harassment charges in FY2019. The number decreased to 6,587 charges in FY2020. Furthermore, sex-based harassment accounted for 32.4% of all individual charge filings in FY2019 and 31.7% of all charges in FY2020. Additionally, Moylan and Wood (2016) surveyed 515 Bachelor's and Master of Social Work Students and found that 55% of participants had experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment. In 2006, the American Association of University Women also administered a survey using a random sample of 2,000 undergraduate students to assess the prevalence of sexual harassment. The results showed that 62% of the students had been sexually harassed and 25% had experienced unwanted sexual touching. Another climate survey with students from 27 universities revealed that

47.7% of them had experienced sexual harassment since their enrollment (Cantor et al., 2015). Sexual harassment is also prevalent in field placements. A 2014 survey with former students in science professions, such as anthropology and zoology, showed that 64% of the participants had experienced sexual harassment, and 20% had experienced sexual assault during their field experiences (Clancy et al., 2014). As there are now more women in medicine than ever before, sexual harassment among female medical students has also become increasingly prevalent (Johnson et al., 2018). The report found that female medical students were 220% more likely to experience sexual harassment perpetrated by faculty and staff than female students in non-science, math, and engineering fields (Johnson et al., 2018).

Targets of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Studies across various work settings have consistently shown that most incidents of sexual harassment are initiated by men against women. In 2018, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (USMSPB) published the Merit Principles Survey (MPS) reporting the incident rates of employees in federal workplaces who had experienced sexual harassment in the previous two years. The report showed that 14% of employees had experienced sexual harassment at least once. Furthermore, three categories of sexual harassment behavior were included in the survey. Results revealed that 30% of women and 13% of men experienced gender harassment. Twenty-six percent of women and 6% of men experienced unwanted sexual attention. Lastly, around 8% of women and 4% of men were faced with sexual coercion from 2014 to 2016 (USMSP, 2018). An EEOC report also showed that 79.1% of sexual harassment receipts were from women and 16.8% were from men. In addition, harassment targets typically have one or more of

these characteristics: vulnerable and young women, women in non-traditional jobs

(Chamberlain et al., 2008), women with irregular or contingent employment contracts

(Takao, 2001), women with disabilities, women from ethnic minorities, and gay and

young men (European Commission, 1999; Fredman, 1997; McCann, 2005; O'Neill &

Payne, 2007). Research also suggests that women who demonstrate masculine

characteristics in male-dominated workplaces are seen as violating gender norms and are

more likely to be harassed (Berdahl, 2007). Rather than a desire for women to conform to

traditional gender norms, this perception may stem from the fact that people are more

willing to punish women when they violate norms than they are to men (Berdahl, 2007).

Characteristics of Harassers

Various studies have identified attributes that are associated with sexual harassers.

First, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's 2016 MPS (USMSPB, 2018) reported

that 68% of the harassment incidents were committed by men and 18% of them were

committed by women. Particularly, harassers are often naive about heterosexual

relationships, lack social conscience, and engage in immature or exploitative behaviors

(Begany & Milburn, 2002; Kosson et al., 1997; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Schweinle et

al.'s (2007) study on men's empathic bias and inaccuracy revealed that the participants'

sexual harassment behavior stemmed from their inaccurate interpretation of women's

intentions in response to rejection and criticism. These men also tended to over-attribute

and over-infer women's rejection and criticism as well as make inferences at the wrong

times, which suggested that men's sexual harassment against women might be more

related to aggression than seduction. Additionally, several studies have examined the link

between the Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) and the Big Five personality traits and

have found relatively modest correlations. For instance, Larrimer-Scherbaum and Popovich (2001) revealed that Agreeableness and Openness to Experience had the strongest and most negative relationships with the LSH. Pryor and Meyers (2000) found that the Big Five personality traits explained 9.6% of the variance in the LSH and that Conscientiousness was the only statistically significant predictor in the negative direction. Moreover, Openness to Experience had a significant interaction effect with conscientiousness to predict the outcome. Specifically, men who were low in conscientiousness were more likely to sexually harass if they were also low in openness to experience.

Relationship Between Harassers and Targets

With regards to the relationship between perpetrators and targets of sexual harassment in the work setting, perpetrators can be superiors, peers, and/or clients (Australia Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004; McDonald et al., 2008; O'Neill & Payne, 2007). According to the USMSPB's 2016 survey (2018), federal employees reported that the most common perpetrator was a co-worker in the same work unit, accounting for 45% of total harassment. Immediate and higher-level supervisors were also frequently mentioned in the report, accounting for 11% and 12% of harassment incidents, respectively. Apart from agency officials and employees, harassment initiated by customers and members of the public was also prevalent, making up 15% of total harassment. Since sexual harassment is a widespread issue in healthcare, there are numerous studies assessing the prevalence rates of sexual harassment in this industry. For example, Hock et al. (2020) studied sexual harassment among ophthalmology faculty, fellows, and residents and found that 81.3% of trainees and 66.7% of faculty had

experienced patient-initiated sexual harassment at least once. Hock's study was consistent with findings from Cabrera et al. (2019), which revealed that 59% of mostly female ophthalmologists had experienced sexual harassment during their careers and that most perpetrators were patients. Another recent survey of 524 medical students at four medical schools showed that 36.6% of sexual harassment was perpetrated by a faculty or staff, and 38.5% was by a fellow student (McClain et al., 2021). As for sexual harassment in academia, Hill and Silva's (2006) nationwide survey indicated that student-to-student harassment was the most common, as more than 80% of students reported being sexually harassed by another student. The survey also pointed out that 18% of the incidents were initiated by faculty or staff, of which 7% were from professors, and others were from resident advisers, security guards, coaches, and deans. Interestingly, 78% of students indicated that they would report a harassment incident if it was initiated by a professor, teaching assistant, or staff member, but only 39% expressed that they would report it if the harassment was from another student. This might suggest that students' perceptions of faculty and staff-initiated sexual harassment are more appalling and unacceptable. On top of that, the power difference in faculty-initiated harassment may escalate the situation, making it too overwhelming for students to handle on their own and increasing the likelihood of reporting (Hill & Silva, 2006).

Individual Response to Sexual Harassment

The MPS (USMSPB, 2018) suggested that employees' reactions to sexual harassment could be classified into three categories: an active response (e.g., telling the harasser to stop, reporting the harassment to the supervisor, filing a formal complaint), avoidance (e.g., avoiding the harasser at work, changing jobs or work locations), and

passive toleration (e.g., ignoring the behavior, making a joke, going along with the behavior). The survey found that avoiding the harasser was the most common response, comprising 61% of the total incidents. The next most common responses were asking the harasser to stop (59%), reporting the behavior to officials (36%), threatening to tell others (35%), and ignoring the behavior (35%). Women's responses to sexual harassment depend on several factors, including age, the severity of the harassment, and the harasser's status in the organization (Baker, Terpstra, Larntz, 1990; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Reese & Lindenberg, 2005; Welsh & Gruber, 1999). In addition, women who have more frequent experience with and exposure to sexual harassment (either as observers or victims) are more likely to respond assertively and use multiple methods of responding (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Munson et al., 2000; Stockdale, 1998). Butler and Chung-Yan (2011) examined the role of organizational justice in how employees respond to sexual harassment incidents. They discovered that perceptions of distributive, procedural, and informational justice interacted with sexual harassment frequency to predict women's decision to report the harassment. Specifically, women who had frequent experience with sexual harassment were more willing to report the harasser when they perceived the organization's grievance policies to be fair and the outcomes of reporting to be just. Similarly, perceptions of distributive and informational justice were found to have interaction effects on the relationship between sexual harassment frequency and women's decision to confront the harasser. This indicates that sexually harassed women were more likely to confront the harasser when they perceived the outcomes of confronting to be fair and expected the person handling the complaint to give them a clear explanation of the process.

Assertive Behavior

Definition of Assertive Behavior

According to Alberti and Emmons (1970), assertive behavior is any action that

reflects an individual's own best interest, such as standing up for oneself, expressing

one's feelings, or exercising one's rights without denying the rights of others. Gambrill

(1977) further divided the construct into positive (i.e., the willingness to express positive

feelings to another) and negative (i.e., the ability to express annoyance or irritation)

assertiveness. Thompson and Berenbaum (2011) developed an instrument of

assertiveness called Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scales (AAA-S) that

measured two distinguishable forms of the construct: adaptive assertiveness and

aggressive assertiveness. They defined adaptive assertiveness as "active behaviors that

get one's needs met in a socially acceptable way without violating others' rights" (p.

324), which resembled Alberti and Emmons' definition of assertive behavior. On the

other hand, they defined aggressive assertiveness as "active behaviors that get one's

needs met in a coercive manner or at the expense of violating others' rights" (p. 324).

Additionally, Thompson and Berenbaum (2011) found that adaptive assertiveness had a

significant and positive correlation with competence, while aggressive assertiveness did

not. This was consistent with their initial prediction because adaptive assertiveness, by

definition, should be associated with one's ability to appropriately navigate various

situations. Furthermore, aggressive assertiveness was significantly and positively

correlated with various forms of aggression such as hostility and verbal aggression, while

adaptive assertiveness was not (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). These findings support

the idea that assertiveness and aggression are two distinct constructs and that the AAA-S

can be used to measure assertiveness in a way that does not confound assertiveness and aggression.

The Relationship Between Assertiveness and Sexual Harassment

Adams-Roy and Barling (1998) looked at which factors would predict a woman's decision to confront and/or report a sexual harasser in seven different organizations (e.g., a hospital, a manufacturing plant, a real estate agency). The findings revealed that assertiveness was predictive of confronting the harasser while formal organizational justice was predictive of reporting the incident. The researchers also suggested that showing resistance against the harasser would increase the individual's self-confidence, regardless of what type of action he/she takes (Payne, 1993). Additionally, in a 1999 article, the European Commission mentioned a Belgian study by Bruynooghe et al. (1995) that described four types of response strategies to sexual harassment: non-intervention, formal, personal, and informal. In particular, formal strategies can take the form of obliging, assertive, or aggressive responses. With the assertive strategy, the person being harassed immediately makes it clear that the behavior is unwanted. The Commission author pointed out that there was evidence suggesting that assertiveness was the most effective strategy among the personal strategies. The article also discussed findings of a German local government study (Holzbecher et al., 1991) and a Swedish national survey (Jämställdhetsombudsmannen, 1987), in which assertive responses such as physically resisting and asking the harass to stop improved the situation for the target. Another Dutch study showed that half of the participants reported that the harassment stopped once they made the harasser aware that the behavior was unwanted (Amstel & Volkers, 1993).

Other than these studies, the research evidence that directly links assertiveness with sexual harassment in the workplace is still very limited. Nonetheless, there is considerable evidence showing the relationship between assertiveness and sexual victimization in general. According to Pinchevsky et al. (2020), sexual victimization consists of non-contact and contact sexual victimization. The former is sexual harassment with no physical contact, while the latter is defined as completed or attempted rape, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted touching. Livingston et al. (2007) found a reciprocal relationship between sexual assertiveness and sexual victimization. In other words, a history of sexual victimization predicts a low level of sexual assertiveness, which leads to a higher risk of sexual victimization. Further, Livingston et al. suggested that training people to be more sexually assertive might help them avoid sexual victimization in the future. Speed et al. (2018) also cited several studies showing that women who have difficulty communicating assertively in sexual situations are at an increased risk for sexual assault victimization (Franz et al., 2016; Kearns & Calhoun, 2010; Kelley et al., 2016; Livingston et al., 2007). Schry and White (2013) examined the effect of social anxiety about interpersonal interactions on sexual victimization among college women. They found that social interaction anxiety is associated with an increased risk of coerced sexual intercourse and rape via the mediating effect of sexual refusal assertiveness. Lastly, Simpson Rowe et al. (2012) developed a preventive intervention program to increase sexual assertiveness among college women. The study found that women who completed the training were less likely to be sexually victimized, and those who were victimized were more likely to respond assertively. Since assertiveness plays an important role in how individuals respond to sexual victimization, and sexual harassment

is embedded within the broader construct of sexual victimization, it might be the case that assertiveness would also influence how individuals respond to sexual harassment. This leads to the purpose of the current study.

Hypothesis: Highly assertive individuals are more likely to respond actively (e.g., telling the harasser to stop, reporting the harassment to the supervisor, filing a formal complaint) to sexual harassment in the workplace than those who are low on assertiveness. Specifically, we hypothesize that both forms of assertiveness (i.e., adaptive and aggressive assertiveness) would be positively associated with an active type of response to sexual harassment.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited from a large, public, southern university. To recruit participants, the administration within the university's Provost office sent a public service announcement to all currently enrolled students, staff, and faculty (approximately 25,000 total) that included a description of the study with a link to the Qualtrics survey. Only individuals at least 18 years or older and with some work experience would meet the requirements to participate. The final sample consisted of 213 participants. Everyone who participated in the study was eligible for inclusion in a raffle for a $50 Amazon gift card. Once the data had been collected, one winner was selected via a random number generator.

Measures Related to Hypothesis

Assertiveness

Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scales (AAA-S, Appendix D) were used to measure assertiveness levels (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). The AAA-S has two subscales that measure adaptive assertiveness and aggressive assertiveness, with reliability coefficients ranging from .69 to .88 (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). In our study, internal reliability for the adaptive and aggressive subscales was .80 and .82, respectively. Additionally, both subscales have been significantly correlated with the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) scores, which is an established and widely used measure of assertiveness (Rathus, 1973; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011).

The AAA-S presented 19 common scenarios that people might experience in their daily lives. For each scenario, a variety of responses were provided. Using a scale of 1

(*never*) to 5 (*always*), participants were asked to rate the extent to which each response

described how they would react to the given situation. An example item was:

"I am at the grocery store and several of my items ring up incorrectly, I…

a. Get angry and demand that the cashier changes the price.

b. Ask the cashier to do a price check on the particular items."

Items 2b, 3a, 4a, 5a, 7b, 8a, 9a, 10a, 12a, 13a, 15a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a assessed

aggressive assertiveness. Ratings on these items were averaged to determine a person's

aggressive assertiveness score. A high score represents a greater level of aggressive

assertiveness. On the other hand, items 1a, 2a, 3b, 4b, 6a, 7a, 8b, 9b, 11a, 12b, 13b, 14a,

15b, 16b, 17b assessed adaptive assertiveness. Similarly, the mean rating on these items

made up the person's adaptive assertiveness score. A high score also indicates a greater

level of adaptive assertiveness. In other words, every participant had a separate score for

each of the two subscales, representing two forms of assertiveness. In the example above,

part a measured the aggressive form of assertiveness, while part b measured the adaptive

form of assertiveness.

Individual Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment

The Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire (Appendix E) was developed

for this study to measure several variables. One of them was the dependent variable,

which assessed participants' response to the most recent sexual harassment incident they

experienced in the workplace and was measured by the item "How did you respond to

that incident? Please check only one box that best describes your response to the

incident." (question 4). For this item, ten response options were provided (i.e., asking the

harasser to stop, reporting the behavior to officials, threatening to tell or telling others,

filing a formal complaint, avoiding the harasser, changing jobs/work locations, ignoring the behavior, making a joke of the behavior, going along with the behavior, and an "Other" option, where they could describe their response in text). Participants were instructed to only choose one option that best described their response to the incident. By selecting a response option, each participant was put into one of the following three categories: active response (i.e., asking the harasser to stop, reporting the behavior to officials, threatening to tell or telling others, or filing a formal complaint), avoidance (i.e., avoiding the harasser, or changing jobs/work locations), or passive toleration (i.e., ignoring the behavior, making a joke of the behavior, or going along with the behavior). In addition, responses under "Other" were qualitatively analyzed to determine if they could be classified under any of the three response categories mentioned above. The content of the questionnaire was largely based on the Merit Principles Survey (MPS) published by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (USMSPB) in 2018. In particular, the three categories of response, the nine response options, and the types of sexual harassment behavior were all from the survey.

Additional Measures

Descriptive Information

Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, ethnicity, and primary affiliation with the university. These variables were not directly related to the hypothesis but were used as supplemental data in the analyses. All demographic questions can be found in Appendix F.

Characteristics of the Sexual Harassment Behavior Experienced

Apart from the dependent variable, the Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire also measured some additional variables. Specifically, the first variable (question 1) assessed whether participants had ever been the target of sexual harassment in the workplace before. The second variable (question 2) was the participants' description of the most recent sexual harassment incident they experienced in the workplace. The third variable (question 3) measured the specific harassment behavior they experienced (e.g., unwelcome sexual comments, pressures for dates, stalking). The last variable (question 5) assessed whether the response being described was typical of how participants responded to other incidents if they had been targets of workplace sexual harassment more than once.

Quality Assurance Items

There were four items (Appendix G) designed to assess insufficient responses at the end of the survey. These questions included: (1) did you take this study seriously, or did you click through the responses, (2) is there any reason why we should not use your data, (3) why should we not include your data in our analyses, and (4) what do you think the purpose of this study is. Participants who selected "Just clicked through" or "My data should not be included in your analyses" were removed from the data analyses. Their responses to "why should we not include your data in our analyses" and "what do you think the purpose of this study is" were also taken into consideration to determine whether they should be removed or not.

Procedure

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to respond to two screening questions (Appendix A) that asked (1) whether they had work experience and (2) whether they were 18 years old or older. Participants who did not respond "Yes" to both of these questions were directed to the end of the survey and informed that they did not meet the eligibility requirements for the study. Participants who did meet the requirements for participation were directed to the informed consent statement (Appendix B), in which information about the purpose of the study, risks and benefits, requirements for eligibility, and the primary investigator's contact information were provided. Participants who did not consent to the study received a message thanking them for their time and were directed to the end of the study. Those who did consent to the study were directed to the Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scales (AAA-S, Appendix D) and given instructions on how to complete them. Once they had completed the AAA-S, they were asked to indicate whether they had ever been the target of sexual harassment in the workplace (question 1 of Appendix E). Participants who responded "No" were directed to the demographic questions (Appendix F). Those who responded "Yes" were asked to (1) describe the most recent workplace sexual harassment incident that they were a target of, (2) specify which harassment behavior they experienced, (3) indicate how they responded to the incident, and (4) indicate whether their response to that incident was typical of how they responded to other sexual harassment incidents they experienced (questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Appendix E, respectively). Next, participants were asked to answer four demographic questions regarding their gender, age, ethnicity, and primary affiliation with the university (Appendix F). After the demographic questions, participants were asked to

respond to four quality assurance questions (Appendix G). Finally, a debriefing section

was presented, thanking participants for their input, restating the purpose of the study,

providing researchers' contact information, and explaining how to enter the drawing to

win the gift card.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Data Cleaning

A total of 637 participants completed the survey, but 416 of them were removed because they either had never experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or did not indicate how they responded to the incident they experienced. Of the remaining 221, ten people described their response to the harassment incident in text, rather than selecting one of the nine options provided. These individuals' responses were qualitatively examined to determine if they could be classified as one of three categories: active, passive, or avoidance. Responses that did not fall under any of these categories were removed. Furthermore, since participants were instructed to choose only one response option that best described how they responded to the incident, individuals who indicated multiple responses (e.g., avoiding and reporting the harasser) were also removed. As a result, only three out of these ten individuals were included in the final analysis. Of the remaining participants, one individual indicated that their data should not be included in the analyses, in response to one of the quality assurance items. Therefore, this individual was also removed. After data cleaning, the final sample consisted of 213 participants.

Descriptive Information

Descriptive statistics were computed for gender, age, ethnicity, and primary affiliation with the university. The average age was 32 years with a standard deviation of 14.7. See Table 1 for a summary of descriptive statistics for the demographic variables.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Variable	*N*	%
Gender	211	
Man	20	9.5
Woman	181	85.8
Non-binary	10	4.7
Ethnicity	211	
White	168	79.6
Hispanic/ Latino	11	5.2
Black/ African American	16	7.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	1.9
Multiple Ethnicities	7	3.3
Other	5	2.4
Primary Affiliation	213	
Student	152	71.4
Staff	35	16.4
Faculty	24	11.3
Other	2	0.9

Individual Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment

For the sexual harassment response variable, participants were given nine options to choose from. Each of these options was categorized as one of three response types: passive, avoidance, and active response, which were then coded as 1, 2, and 3, respectively, for data analyses. Across 213 participants, reporting the behavior to an official/supervisor and ignoring the behavior were the most common responses, accounting for approximately 22.5% and 22.1% of the participants. The specific frequencies of each response category and behavior are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency of Individual Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment

Response Category	Behavior	%	Total %
	Ignoring the behavior	21.1	
Passive Response	Making a joke of the behavior	8.5	34.3
	Going along with the behavior	3.8	
Avoidance	Avoiding the person	15.5	21.1
Response	Changing location or job	5.6	
	Asking or telling the person to stop	17.8	
	Filing a formal complaint	3.3	
Active Response	Reporting the behavior to a supervisor or other official	22.5	44.6
	Threatening to tell or telling others	0.9	

Primary Analyses

The initial plan was to perform a discriminant analysis to assess whether adaptive and aggressive assertiveness would statistically significantly predict which sexual harassment response category participants would fall under. Before running the analysis, data were screened for violation of assumptions of linearity, multivariate normality, independence of predictors, homoscedasticity, absence of multicollinearity, and absence of strongly influential outliers.

First of all, scatterplots of the independent and dependent variables provided evidence supporting the linearity assumption. The normality assumption for two assertiveness subscales was assessed by examining skew and kurtosis values along with the Shapiro-Wilk test. Boxplots, Q-Q plots, and histograms were also taken into consideration. The skewness (-0.23, $SE = .17$), kurtosis (-0.03, $SE = .33$), and a non-significant Shapiro-Wilk test [$W(213) = .99, p = .072$] met reasonable assumptions of normality for the adaptive subscale ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.60$). The Q-Q plot and histogram

also showed a normal distribution. The boxplot revealed one outlier, but in general, there was evidence that normality had been met for this variable. As for the aggressive subscale ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.50$), the skewness (.60, $SE = .17$) and kurtosis (-.35, $SE = .33$) indicated a positive skew distribution. A non-normal distribution was further indicated by a statistically significant Shapiro-Wilk test [$W(213) = .95$, $p < .001$], Q-Q plot, and histogram. The boxplot also detected one outlier. For these reasons, normality was not assumed for the aggressive subscale. Next, Mahalanobis distance scores were generated from linear regression analysis to screen for multivariate outliers. In the current analysis, the degrees of freedom were two, which equated to a critical Chi-square value of 13.82 (a = .001). The maximum Mahalanobis distance score across all cases (10.14) did not exceed the critical value, which met the assumption of no strongly influential outliers. In addition, the independence of predictors was assumed as scores on adaptive and aggressive assertiveness did not come from repeated measurements or matched data. The absence of multicollinearity was also assumed as Pearson's correlation coefficient ($r = .33$) between the two assertiveness subscales was less than .80. Lastly, the assumption of equal population covariance matrices was met, as assessed by Box's M test (Box's $M = 2.48$, $p = .875$).

  Because the normality assumption was violated, multinomial logistic regression was used for data analyses instead of discriminant analysis. Assumptions for multinomial logistic regression were also checked, including assumptions of independence of errors, linearity of independent variables and log-odds, absence of multicollinearity, and absence of strongly influential outliers. The Box-Tidwell test was used to check for the linearity of independent variables and log odds. Results showed that all log-transformed

interaction terms between the assertiveness subscales and their corresponding natural log were not statistically significant, with p values ranging from .196 to .956, thus meeting the assumption. The other assumptions had already been met, as addressed previously.

Since all assumptions were met, a standard multinomial logistic regression was run to predict participants' response category to sexual harassment based on their scores on adaptive and aggressive assertiveness. Three levels of the dependent variable were represented, including passive, avoidance, and active, with active response being the reference category. Adaptive and aggressive assertiveness were predictors. Four demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity, and primary affiliation with the university) were entered as covariates. In other words, there were six predictors in the regression model. Among the predictors, age, adaptive assertiveness, and aggressive assertiveness were continuous variables, with higher scores indicating greater levels of assertiveness. On the other hand, gender, ethnicity, and primary affiliation were categorical variables. Gender had three categories (i.e., Man, Woman, and Non-binary). Ethnicity had six categories (i.e., White, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Multiple Ethnicities, and Other). Primary affiliation had four categories (i.e., Student, Faculty, Staff, and Other).

Concerning the decision to control for these variables, previous research has found that women are more likely to be targets of workplace sexual harassment than men and that ethnic minorities are more likely to experience sexual harassment than Whites (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). Because of that, ethnic minority women are subject to double jeopardy at work, in which they experience the most sexual harassment as both women and members of a minority group. In addition, several studies have shown that women

are generally less assertive than men (Crassini et al., 1979; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). Therefore, gender and ethnicity were controlled for in the regression model to isolate the effects of assertiveness on response category to sexual harassment. Moreover, McDonald (2012) found that young women and men were among the most common targets of sexual harassment in the workplace. Previous research has also suggested that age is positively correlated with levels of social and communication skills (Jaworski et al., 2017). Since assertiveness has been defined as "a way of actively responding to interpersonal conflict with the intention of getting one's needs met" (Hollandsworth, 1977), having proficient social and communication skills may contribute to one's ability to behave assertively in response to interpersonal conflict. Because sexual harassment is a form of interpersonal conflict, age might have an impact on an individual's assertiveness level and how they respond to a sexual harassment incident. Thus, the effect of age was controlled for in the regression analysis. Finally, since students, faculty, and staff might react to sexual harassment incidents differently for a variety of reasons (e.g., familiarity with the university, status at the university, experience in the workplace), primary affiliation with the university was also controlled for in the analysis.

Results of the multinomial logistic analysis showed that the six-predictor model did not provide a statistically significant prediction success [-2 Log Likelihood = 414.21, $\chi 2(12, N = 203) = 16.18, p = .183$]. The Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 indicated that the model accounted for approximately 8.7% of the total variance. The overall prediction accuracy was 48.3% across the three response categories, which means that only 98 out of 203 participants were correctly classified. For each of the categories, the accuracy rates were 38.6%, 0%, and 79.8% for passive, avoidance, and active, respectively. In short, the

hypothesis was not supported. For exploratory purposes, we ran an additional

multinomial logistic regression with nine levels of the dependent variable (i.e., ignoring

the behavior, reporting the harasser, changing job/location, etc.) and also found non-

statistically significant results [-2 Log Likelihood = 712.80, $\chi 2(48, N = 203) = 60.36, p =$

.109]. The prediction accuracy was lower than the first model, with an overall prediction

accuracy rate of 28.1%.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the association between assertiveness and individual response to

sexual harassment in the workplace, a topic that has not been substantially studied so far.

We hypothesized that higher levels of assertiveness would predict a higher likelihood of

responding actively to sexual harassment incidents at work. Results from data analyses

indicated that our hypothesis was not supported. Specifically, adaptive and aggressive

assertiveness did not statistically significantly predict which response category

participants would fall under when encountering sexual harassment in the workplace. Our

results seem to suggest that one's level of trait assertiveness does not influence their

behavioral response to sexual harassment in the workplace. One possible explanation is

that people may differ from each other in how they interpret sexual harassment

experiences and how they respond to them. Indeed, research shows that people can

interpret the same sexual harassment behavior differently (e.g., Erdreich et al. 1994).

Alternatively, the sexual harassment experience might be either so alarming or

traumatizing that people do not respond with the same level of assertiveness they would

normally display. Regardless, our findings are inconsistent with previous research

evidence that had suggested assertiveness may predict women's likelihood to confront

the harasser (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998). Because the literature on the linkage between

assertiveness and sexual harassment response is still limited, and the evidence so far has

been mixed, it is difficult to draw a clear conclusion regarding this relationship. Although

there may be truly no relationship between these two variables, these mixed findings

could also mean that this relationship is more complicated than we expected and requires

further research to fully understand it. Perhaps some confounds were overlooked or the

findings reflect limitations with the study design. Future research may be able to answer these questions.

Strengths of This Study

Despite the non-significant findings, this study design had its strengths. First, our study was able to reach a large, diverse audience with multiple different demographic groups being represented. Since workplace sexual harassment affects a wide range of individuals, the fact that this study was able to include input from people from different ethnicities, genders, age groups, and positions in the university contributed to the generalizability of the findings. In addition, our sample was predominantly women and most sexual harassment victims are women. These made our findings more generalizable since our sample was a good representation of the population. Similarly, the fact that students are typically employed in a variety of jobs and industries, allowing them to draw from different harassment situations and experiences, also added to the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, by measuring and controlling for demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity), our study was able to minimize the effects of these confounds and isolate the impact of assertiveness on sexual harassment response.

Our study also employed pre-established and reliable measurement tools for our independent (i.e., adaptive and aggressive assertiveness scales) and dependent variables (i.e., sexual harassment response questionnaire based on the USMSPB's 2016 survey), which helped strengthen the validity of our findings. Another strength of the study was the length of the survey. The survey took a relatively short amount of time to complete, with a median duration of nine minutes across 213 participants. This made it less of a

hassle for participants to take the survey, which helped avoid boredom and result in high-quality responses.

Additionally, to capture the dependent variable (i.e., individual response to sexual harassment at work), a significant amount of time and consideration was spent in the early stage of the study design. The decision to measure participants' response to the most recent harassment incident, rather than the most salient or extreme, was to capture how they would typically respond to any harassment incident at work. Since assertiveness has been conceptualized as a trait (e.g., Bakan, 1966), and traits describe stable patterns of behavior over time (Caspi et al., 2005), we believe that one's response to the most typical incident would better reflect their level of trait assertiveness than their response to the most extreme incident. However, there are trade-offs to this decision, which will be discussed in the limitations of the study.

In the sexual harassment experience questionnaire, since participants were asked to recall an incident in the past, we used several strategies to help refresh their memories so that they could provide the most accurate description of their actual response to the incident. Specifically, we first asked participants to describe the harassment incident in text. This prompted them to relive the experience and reconnect with the state of mind that they were in when the incident occurred. Then, they were asked to select which specific harassment behavior they experienced in that incident. With similar intent, this item was added to make the participants' recollection of the harassment incident more vivid. The next item on the questionnaire was to capture the dependent variable, assessing which response behavior the participants demonstrated in the incident. Other than the nine response options provided (e.g., ignoring the behavior, reporting the

harasser, changing job or location, etc.), there was also an "Other" option, in which participants could describe the response behavior in their own words. It was understandable that not all response behaviors would fall neatly into the nine categories provided. Therefore, allowing people to describe their responses in text was to avoid missing out on high-quality input that could be used for analyses. These free responses were then qualitatively examined in the data analysis process, adding three valid responses to the final sample. After this question, participants were asked to indicate whether the response they selected was typical of how they responded to other incidents if they had experienced more than one incident. Going back to the rationale behind typicality vs. saliency mentioned earlier, this item was included to examine whether the response they described in previous questions truly reflected their typical response to sexual harassment incidents, or whether it reflected an out-of-the-ordinary response behavior to an extreme incident. Results showed that 62% of the sample indicated that their response was typical of how responded to other harassment incidents, 12% indicated that it was not typical, and 26% indicated that they had only experienced one sexual harassment incident in the workplace. In other words, for most participants who had experienced workplace sexual harassment more than once, how they responded to the most recent incident indeed reflected how they typically responded to the rest of the incidents.

Lastly, four quality assurance items were included in the survey to ensure that only high-quality and valid responses would be used for data analyses. This means that individuals who did not take the study seriously would be removed from the data set. As

a result, one participant was screened out as they indicated that their response should not be used for data analyses.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations with the study design that need to be addressed. First, participants could only choose one option that best described how they responded to the harassment incident they experienced. For several participants that responded in multiple ways to the incident, some of them checked "Other" and described their actions in a free-response format, rather than choosing one response option that best described their action as instructed. These individuals were removed from the final sample because the statistical analysis technique we used required categories of the dependent variable to be mutually exclusive. In other words, this study was not designed in a way that could utilize participants' input that consisted of multiple responses to sexual harassment. Because of that, future research should design the study in a way that allows participants to indicate multiple responses to the harassment incident they experienced.

The second limitation is that participants were asked to describe the most recent sexual harassment incident in the workplace that they were the target of. The reasoning behind this question was that how a person responds to the most recent incident is more likely to reflect their thoughts and feelings now, as opposed to how they responded to an incident they experienced prior to the most recent incident. People may grow and become more mature over time, which can influence how they react to interpersonal conflict and sexual harassment. However, using the same logic, if the last time a participant experienced sexual harassment in the workplace was over ten years ago, not only might their recollection of the incident not be accurate, but the way they responded to that

incident might not reflect who they are today, such as how assertive they were/are. This could potentially confound the observed relationship between adaptive assertiveness and sexual harassment response. A possible solution for this problem is to establish an upper limit on how long it has been since the participant's last experience with workplace sexual harassment and only accept data from "recent incidents." What constitutes "recent" will of course require ample research and consideration. Additionally, the most recent incident may not be the most salient or traumatic experience. Individuals' reactions to a sexual harassment incident can vary dramatically depending on how traumatic or severe the experience is. Therefore, how they respond to the most recent incident might not be representative of how they would respond to other incidents that are more severe in nature.

Finally, future research should continue to improve the individual response to sexual harassment measure. There are several ways that this measure could be further developed. First, since it has been established that there are two forms of assertiveness (i.e., an adaptive component and an aggressive component), the measure of response to sexual harassment should incorporate more aggressive or confrontational response options, such as "Physically fighting the harasser" or "Deliberately sabotaging the harasser's reputation." Currently, the nine response options are mostly examples of socially acceptable behaviors that tap more into adaptive assertiveness, rather than coercive or unacceptable behaviors that reflect aggressive assertiveness. Second, the rationale behind the classification of harassment behaviors into each response category (i.e., passive, avoidance, or active) is not entirely clear and somewhat debatable. For instance, "avoiding the person" or "changing job or location" could be viewed as a

conscious and active attempt to remove oneself from the sexual harassment experience (i.e., an active response) or as a way to minimize interactions with the harasser (i.e., an avoidance response). Therefore, there needs to be an explicit explanation for what constitutes an active response as opposed to a passive or avoidance response. Whether it lies in the degree of confrontation initiated by the target against the harasser or the target's attempt to remove himself/herself from the harassment situation, each response category should be clearly defined and distinguished from one another.

Research and Practical Implications

Even though this study did not produce the results that we expected, our findings pose new questions regarding the relationship between assertiveness and sexual harassment in the workplace. For example, one obvious question is whether there were additional variables of relevance that influence the association between these two variables but were overlooked in this study. For instance, future research should account for the type of harassment situation in the predictive model. Another question is whether using different measures of assertiveness or sexual harassment response would yield different results. By addressing the limitations of the study, future researchers may be able to better understand the role of assertiveness in individuals' response to sexual harassment or demonstrate that assertiveness does not in fact affect an individual's response to sexual harassment.

Moving beyond the findings and limitations of this study, since workplace sexual harassment has been a pressing issue for a long time and will likely continue to be important in the future, we suggest that future research continue exploring the influence of different individual factors on how people react to sexual harassment, whether it is

assertiveness or other characteristics. If there is a specific skill or set of skills that dictate whether a person confronts or reports the harasser, it might be beneficial to train employees on that skill to be able to defend themselves in sexual harassment situations.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the association between assertiveness and individual response to sexual harassment incidents at work. We hypothesized that higher levels of adaptive and aggressive assertiveness would predict a higher likelihood of responding actively to sexual harassment incidents in the workplace. To test this prediction, we conducted an online survey with a total of 213 participants. The survey measured their scores on both adaptive and aggressive assertiveness as well as how they responded to the most recent sexual harassment incident that they were a target of at work. Using multinomial logistic regression analysis, the results showed that adaptive and aggressive assertiveness did not statistically significantly predict which category of sexual harassment response participants would fall under. The overall prediction accuracy rate was 48.3%, which means that only 98 out of 203 participants were correctly classified. This suggests that the model was only slightly more effective than predicting based on random chance (i.e., approximately 33% as there were three response options). Despite the non-significant results, our findings have raised several new research questions that are worthy of further investigation. By addressing these questions, future research will be able to fully understand the effects of trait assertiveness on how individuals respond to workplace sexual harassment. A better understanding in this area can bring significant benefits to researchers, organizations, and the employees themselves.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Screening Questions

1. Do you have work experience?

☐ Yes
☐ No

2. Are you 18 or older?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Information and Disclosure Section

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project in which you have been invited to participate. Please read this disclosure and feel free to ask any questions. The investigators must answer all of your questions and please save this page as a PDF for future reference.

- Your participation in this research study is voluntary.
- You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time without loss of any benefits.

For additional information on your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance (Tel 615-494-8918 or send your emails to irb_information@mtsu.edu. (URL: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb).

Please read the following and respond to the consent questions at the bottom if you wish to enroll in this study.

1. **Purpose**: The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between assertiveness and individual response to sexual harassment in the workplace.

2. **Description**: You will be asked to complete an assessment of assertiveness, provide some information about your experience with workplace sexual harassment, and answer several demographic questions.

3. **IRB Approval Details**

   - Protocol Title: The Relationship Between Assertiveness and Individual Response to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.
   - Primary Investigator: Ivory Tran
   - PI Department & College: Psychology - College of Behavioral and Health Sciences
   - Faculty Advisor (if PI is a student): Patrick McCarthy, Ph.D.
   - Protocol ID: 22-1134 2q   Approval Date: 04/01/2022   Expiration Date: 08/31/2023

4. **Duration**: The survey should take approximately 10-20 minutes to complete.

5. **Here are your rights as a participant: (MANDATORY)**

   - Your participation in this research is voluntary.
   - You may skip any item that you don't want to answer, and you may stop the experiment at any time (but see the note below)

- If you leave an item blank by either not clicking or entering a response, you may be warned that you missed one, just in case it was an accident. But you can continue the study without entering a response if you didn't want to answer any questions.
- Some items may require a response to accurately present the survey.

6. **Risks & Discomforts:** There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. If you do not feel comfortable answering any of the questions, you may choose to skip them or exit the survey at any point in the study.

7. **Benefits:** Findings from this study will contribute to the research regarding the relationship between assertiveness and how individuals respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.

8. **Expected costs:** There are no costs for participating in this study.

9. **Identifiable Information**: You will NOT be asked to provide identifiable personal information/You may provide contact information for follow-up / We may request your contact information for compensation purposes

10. **Compensation for participation**: Everyone who participates in the study will be eligible for inclusion in a raffle for a $50 Amazon gift card. Once the data has been collected, raffle winners will be selected via a random number generator.

11. **Confidentiality.** All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, *if* you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

12. **Contact Information.** If you should have any questions about this research study or possibly injury, please feel free to contact Ivory Tran by telephone at 503-808-0419 or by email at ptt2j@mtmail.mtsu.edu OR my faculty advisor, Dr. Patrick McCarthy, by patrick.mccarthy@mtsu.edu. You can also contact the MTSU Office of compliance via telephone (615 494 8918) or by email (compliance@mtsu.edu). This contact information will be presented again at the end of the experiment.

By continuing with this survey, you are also acknowledging that you have read and understand this consent form, are at least 18 years of age, have prior work experience, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described.

☐ I have read the above information, and I consent to participate in this study.
☐ I do not consent to participate in this study.

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129
FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn.. 0003571

IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Friday, April 01, 2022

Protocol Title	***The Relationship between Assertiveness and Individual Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment***
Protocol ID	**22-1134 2q**

Principal Investigator	**Ivory Tran** (Student)	*Faculty Advisor:* Patrick McCarthy
Co-Investigators	Alexander Jackson and Michael Hein	
Investigator Email(s)	*ptt2j@mtmail.mtsu.edu; Patrick.mccarthy@mtsu.edu*	
Department/Affiliation	Psychology	

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category *(2) Educational Tests, surveys, interviews or observations of public behavior (Qualtrics Survey).* A summary of the IRB action and other particulars of this protocol are shown below:

IRB Action	**EXEMPT from further IRB Review** Exempt from further continuing review but other oversight requirements apply
Date of Expiration	**8/31/2023** *Date of Approval:* **4/1/22** *Recent Amendment:* **NONE**
Sample Size	FIVE HUNDRED (500)
Participant Pool	**Healthy adults (18 or older) – Public University Personnel**
Exceptions	Online consent followed by internet-based survey using Qualtrics is permitted (Qualtrics links on file).
Type of Interaction	☐ Non-interventional or Data Analysis ☒ Virtual/Remote/Online Interview/survey ☐ In person or physical– Mandatory COVID-19 Management (refer next page)
Mandatory Restrictions	**1. All restrictions for exemption apply.** **2. The participants must be 18 years or older.** **3. Mandatory ACTIVE informed consent.** **4. Identifiable information, such as, names, addresses, and voice/video data, must not be obtained.** **5. NOT approved for in-person data collection.**
Approved IRB Templates	*IRB Templates:* Recruitment Email and Online Informed Consent *Non-MTSU Templates:* NONE
Research Inducement	NONE
Comments	NONE

Summary of the Post-approval Requirements: The PI and FA must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer "*Quick Links*" in the bottom):

- ***Final Report:*** The Faculty Advisor (FA) is responsible for submitting a final report to close-out this protocol before <mark>8/31/2023</mark>; if more time is needed to complete the data collection, the FA must request an extension by email. REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT. **Failure to close-out (or request extension) may result in penalties** including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol or withholding student diploma.
- ***Protocol Amendments***: IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as:
  - Addition/removal of subject population and sample size.
  - Change in investigators.
  - Changes to the research sites – appropriate permission letter(s) from may be needed.
  - Alternation to funding.
  - Amendments must be clearly described in an addendum request form submitted by the FA.
  - The proposed change must be consistent with the approved protocol and they must comply with exemption requirements.
- ***Reporting Adverse Events:*** Research-related injuries to the participants and other events , such as, deviations & misconduct, must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu.
- ***Research Participant Compensation:*** Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Exempt protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and MUST NOT include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- ***COVID-19:*** Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the FA.

COVID-19 Management:
The FA must enforce social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an "adverse event."
- The FA must enforce the MTSU's "Return-to-work" questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled and signed by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use
- **FA's Responsibility:** The FA is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the FA must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the PI will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:
The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would not result in the cancellation of the protocol's eligibility for exemption. <mark>*Only THREE procedural amendments will be entertained per year*</mark> *(changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).*

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Post-approval IRB Actions:
The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Mandatory Data Storage Requirement:
All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additionally,

the Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer "Quick Links" below for policy 129*). Subsequently, the data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects. **The IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this notice**. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:
- Post-approval Responsibilities: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php
- Exemption Procedures: https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExemptPaperWork.php
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php

Appendix D: Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scales (AAA-S)

Below is a list of different common situations you may experience in daily life. Following each situation is a variety of responses. Rate to what extent each response best describes how you would react to the given situation. Here is an example:

In my free time, I…

    a. Play sports   Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always
    b. Spend time with family   1 2 3 4 5
    c. Hang out with friends   1 2 3 4 5
    d. Watch movies   1 2 3 4 5

1. I have been working at the same company for a while. It has been over a year since I received a promotion. I…
    a. Ask my boss about getting a promotion.
2. When someone close to me unjustly criticizes my behavior, I…
    a. Openly discuss the criticism with the person.
    b. React angrily and tell the person that she/he shouldn't be throwing stones.
3. When someone I don't know well borrows something from me and forgets to return it, I…
    a. Demand it back.
    b. Ask if she/he is done and ask for it back.
4. I am at the grocery store and several of my items ring up incorrectly, I…
    a. Get angry and demand that the cashier changes the price.
    b. Ask the cashier to do a price check on the particular items.
5. At a meeting at work, I keep trying to say something but keep getting interrupted. I…
    a. Without apologizing, cut the next person off from talking…after all I have been waiting to talk too.
6. My friends and I are trying to decide on a place to eat. They come to a decision about going to a place to eat that I do not like. I…
    a. Tell them that I have had some bad experiences there and that I would prefer a different place.
7. If I start to think that someone I don't know well is taking advantage of me, I…
    a. Talk rationally to the person and express concern about the one-sidedness of the relationship.
    b. Tell the person off the next time she/he takes advantage of me again.
8. When I have to return an item to a store without the original receipt, I…
    a. Take it to the store and demand a refund.
    b. Stand my ground if the sales person gives me a hard time.
9. If someone I know well says something that hurts my feelings, I…
    a. Would tell him/her off.
    b. Provide evidence why the comment was incorrect.

10. If the postal carrier continually forgets to take my outgoing mail, I…
    a. Raise my voice at him/her the next time I see him/her.
11. If I find a mistake on a bill I receive in the mail, I…
    a. Call up the company and talk to someone about the mistake.
12. If someone I don't know well disagrees with me during a conversation, I…
    a. React angrily.
    b. Continue elaborating on my opinion until the person understands it.
13. If I am at a performance and someone keeps talking loudly, I…
    a. Would tell the person to shut up.
    b. Say something to the usher.
14. If someone I hire is not completing his/her work satisfactorily, I…
    a. Somehow let the person know what to do differently.
15. If a neighbor I know well returns something of mine in poor shape, I…
    a. Get angry and demand that it be replaced.
    b. Request that my neighbor replace or fix it.
16. If someone cuts in line ahead of me at the movies, I…
    a. Start making loud comments about how rude the person is.
    b. (if I am in a hurry) ask the person to move to the back of the line.
17. If the new newspaper deliverer does not deliver the newspaper a couple of days, I…
    a. Yell at the newspaper deliverer the next time I see him/her.
    b. Mention the oversight next time I see him/her.
18. If a close family member keeps interrupting me when I am talking, I…
    a. Snap at him/her.
19. If someone close to me kept telling other people things I had told him/her in confidence, I would…
    a. Yell at the person next time I see him/her.

Appendix E: Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire

1. Have you ever been the target of sexual harassment in the workplace? Refer to the definition provided below as you answer the question.

   Workplace sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual behavior that creates a hostile or offensive work environment. Some examples include crude remarks about your appearance, repeated sexual requests despite rejection, and deliberate non-consensual touching.

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

2. Please describe the most recent sexual harassment incident in the workplace that you were the target of. Refer back to the definition of workplace sexual harassment if needed.

   Workplace sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual behavior that creates a hostile or offensive work environment. Some examples include crude remarks about your appearance, repeated sexual requests despite rejection, and deliberate non-consensual touching.

3. Which harassment behavior did you experience in the incident? Please check only one box that best describes the harassment behavior you experienced.

   ☐ Exposure to sexually oriented conversations
   ☐ Unwelcome sexual teasing, jokes, comments, or questions
   ☐ Derogatory or unprofessional terms related to sex or gender
   ☐ Exposure to sexually oriented material
   ☐ Unwelcome invasion of personal space
   ☐ Unwelcome sexually suggestive looks or gestures
   ☐ Unwelcome communications of a sexual nature
   ☐ Pressure for dates
   ☐ Stalking
   ☐ Offer of preferential treatment for sexual favors
   ☐ Pressure for sexual favors
   ☐ Sexual assault or attempted sexual assault
   ☐ Other: ____

4. How did you respond to that incident? Please check only one box that best describes your response to the incident.

   ☐ Ignoring the behavior

☐ Asking or telling the person to stop
☐ Avoiding the person
☐ Filing a formal complaint
☐ Making a joke of the behavior
☐ Going along with the behavior
☐ Reporting the behavior to a supervisor or other official
☐ Threatening to tell or telling others
☐ Changing location or job
☐ Other: _____

5. If you have been the target of more than one sexual harassment incident in the workplace, was this response typical of how you responded to the other incidents?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I have only experienced one sexual harassment incident in the workplace.

Appendix F: Demographic Questions

1. What gender do you identify as?

   ☐ Man
   ☐ Woman
   ☐ Non-binary
   ☐ Other: _____
   ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. How old are you?
   _____

3. Please specify your ethnicity.
   ☐ White
   ☐ Hispanic or Latino
   ☐ Black or African American
   ☐ Native American or American Indian
   ☐ Asian / Pacific Islander
   ☐ Multiple Ethnicities
   ☐ Other: _____

4. What is your primary affiliation with the university?
   ☐ Student
   ☐ Staff
   ☐ Faculty
   ☐ Other: _____

Appendix G: Quality Assurance Items

1. Did you take this study seriously, or did you click through the responses?
   ☐ Just clicked through
   ☐ Took the study seriously

2. Is there any reason why we should **NOT** use your data?
   ☐ My data should not be included in your analyses.
   ☐ My data should be included in your analyses.

3. Why should we **NOT** include your data in our analyses?
   ☐ I wasn't really paying attention.
   ☐ I just clicked randomly.
   ☐ I didn't understand the task/questions.
   ☐ I didn't really know what I was doing.
   ☐ I just skimmed through the questions.
   ☐ Other: _____

4. Finally, what do you think the purpose of this study is?
   _____