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From me too to what now: advancing scholarship on sex harassment issue 1: a persistent problem

As a social problem, sex harassment is pervasive and persistent. Throughout the world and over millennia, powerful people – usually adult men – have imposed their will, their sexual will, on less powerful people – most often women and girls. No matter what the blend of forces impelling the perpetrators, the effects on victims can be devastating. And, of course, what we today see as a social problem was not so labeled in the past.

If you consider how long the problem has plagued societies, you might marvel at how rapidly the narrative has changed. It was only in 1965 that sex discrimination became illegal in the USA (Civil Rights Act of 1964). By the mid-1970s, the term “sexual harassment” was used by women at Cornell University at a speak-out against sexual exploitation in the work place (see Baker, 2007) and then by legal scholar, Catherine McKinnon (1979). More importantly, before the end of the 1970s, case law established that sexual harassment was a form of sex discrimination and therefore illegal and punishable by law (Meritior Savings Bank v. Vinson, 1986). A subsequent shift in labels from “sexual harassment” to “sex harassment” and “sex-based harassment” has called attention to the fact that the domination of women and the policing of masculinity rather than sexual desire are the primary drivers of harassment (Berdahl, 2007). Scholars and activists have combined forces to help society move down the path of social change.

Along the bumpy road of change came Anita Hill. Reluctantly the shy law professor from the University of Oklahoma described to the watching world how she had been sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas, then nominee to the Supreme Court. The American nation exploded into debate. Thomas was handily confirmed. The year was 1991. In total, 15 years after the Thomas hearings, Tarana Burke coined the term “Me Too.” As part of her recovery from different incidents of sexual abuse, Burke wanted to let other victims know that they were not alone. Solidarity was key.

Then on October 15, 2017, activist and star of film and television, Alyssa Milano tweeted: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted, write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” The volcano was live. Lava beds of tweets began to flow with violent and sporadic periodic eruptions ever since.

In countries outside the USA, change has also occurred (Bell et al., 2002; Park, 2017). A term that sounds just like “sexual harassment” was imported into the Japanese language right after the Thomas-Hill hearings and soon became part of the lexicon. By the 1990s, even the French, fabled for their obsession with romance, determined that sexual harassment was not romantic, and their Parliament made sexual harassment illegal.

While the attention of the general public has waxed and waned as issues burst into the media spotlight and then dimmed out, the attention of scholars to sex-based harassment has been more or less constant since the 1980s. Over 6,000 scholarly articles and books show the words “sexual harassment” or “sex harassment” in the title (Google Scholar searches, 2018). Edited volumes are in no short supply. Nor are authored books.

Our edited volume contributes to the scholarship. In this first of two issues, we present a blend theoretical, historical and meta-narratives as well as empirical research that build on the understanding the dynamics of sexual harassment. Some of our contributors have helped to shape the very field of scholarship in the social sciences while others come newly to the area. Two of the pieces involve experimental manipulations. Two mine field data for insights; two others call our attention to what the Me Too movements have potentially
Several pieces in our volume present basic social scientific studies on the topic of sexual harassment. Louise Fitzgerald (2020) reviews the literature that exists on three categories of employed women (agricultural workers, domestic workers, and wait-staff) and one category of women that spans occupations: tenants in low-income housing. She shows the dynamics of vulnerability and also suggests how collective action can empower the vulnerable.

Quite a different methodology is seen in the second article, by Margaret Stockdale et al. (2020), who distinguish between self-focused power and other-focused power, with the latter being akin to social responsibility. To their surprise, they find that in an experimental situation, both types of power increase the declared likelihood of harassment. The links travel along (i.e. are mediated by) expected paths and are moderated by some personality variables.

Whereas Stockdale et al. (2020) ponder factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment, Alexis Adams-Clark et al. (2020) look at the consequences of harassment and document in particular a cluster of negative consequences of harassment for its victims concerning dissociation. Victims may have used dissociation to cope with harassment; but they then are plagued by its continuation long afterwards.

The fourth and fifth contributions to the present volume turn more directly to the present. The fourth article by Stephanie Brown and Jericka Battle (2020) centers on the concept of ostracism. Ostracism serves to isolate victims, often intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. By connecting victims, note Brown and Battle (2020), the #MeToo Movement necessarily serves to combat the effects of ostracism. Even those victims who continue to be isolated in their own organizations can find comradeship and support via social media.

In the fifth piece, Brittney Amber et al. (2020) conduct an experiment, again using a sample of Amazon’s MTurk workers, to address an important question arising from the #MeToo Movement. Social commentators have wondered whether the current apparent explosive increase in the number of cases of sexual harassment arises from media attention. Amber et al. (2020) find that participants who are exposed to news stories about sexual misconduct admit that the stories serve reminders of their own experiences; but, importantly, participants exposed to other stories are just as likely as the first set of participants to report having been sexually harassed. Amber et al. (2020) conclude that the #MeToo Movement has made it acceptable to admit past harassment but has not somehow elevated reporting above its real prevalence.

The next piece turns to data collected from those participating in the #MeToo Movement. Kimberly Schneider and Nathan Carpenter (2020) accessed the tweets that were posted in the first 24 hours after Alyssa Milano made her post. They selected ten thousand tweets for analysis, sorting the messages into those that described an incident and those that reacted to a discloser. Among the many interesting findings of Schneider and Carpenter’s (2020) work is a very reassuring note that less than 3 percent of the tweets gave evidence of backlash.

At the conclusion of our issue is a reflective piece by Sarah Heck (2020). Heck’s thought-provoking analysis can be seen as a sort of meta-story. It allows us to see how the narrative about sexual harassment has changed and is changing due not only to social events but also to the academics who provide analyses of the events. As Heck (2020) so poignantly reminds us, activism and scholarship go hand in hand.

As a companion to this special issue, we will gather additional research in a second issue on sex harassment. The question at the center of the second issue is “given what we now know: What now?” Where might we go from here?

Consistent with our contributors, we editors distinguish between neutrality and objectivity, two concepts that are too often confounded in the academy (Crosby and Bearman, 2006).
The Me Too and related social movements have broken the silence and demanded action. We hope these issues respond effectively to that call and contribute to the elimination – or at least the great diminishment – of sex harassment. We hope that our conceptualizations and our objective data will help us understand more about equality, diversity and inclusion. But we eschew the illusion of neutrality. Rather we hope that our science will help create worlds that are more equal, diverse and inclusive.

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References


Unseen: the sexual harassment of low-income women in America

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the harassment of vulnerable women whose lives and experiences remain largely unseen in the era of #MeToo.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws from the sparse empirical literature as well as the more informal accounts provided by social justice organizations, investigative journalists and legal commentary about four spheres that have largely remained invisible: women in low-income housing, agricultural workers, janitorial workers and restaurant workers. It also reviews the surprising success stories that some of these groups have achieved and invites us to ponder what we can learn from them.

Findings – Farm workers, sub-minimum wage restaurant workers, single mothers and janitorial workers are several groups that were not highlighted by the current movement.

Social implications – Highlighting the experiences of those who remain largely hidden in and from academic discourse and, more largely, the public eye enlarges the scope of knowledge and encourages further scholarly inquiry.

Originality/value – Combining the perspectives of scholar and social justice activist illuminates the depth and breadth of largely invisible classes of harassment victims and the potentially novel remedies they have initiated.

Keywords Gender, Feminism, #MeToo movement

Paper type General review

Although sexual harassment has been documented since at least the Industrial Revolution (Bularzik, 1978), it was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that the issue reached public awareness, first as a joke, then as an aberration, and finally as a social problem. Even today, when powerful men have toppled before our eyes and #MeToo has become a catchphrase, there are millions of women for whom these changes are irrelevant or nonexistent. This paper is about them.

In the following pages, I explore the intersection of sex and power in the lives of some of the women whom science, the movement and sometimes the law have forgotten: farmworkers raped in the fields and packing sheds of the agricultural industry; sub-minimum wage restaurant workers groped by the customers upon whose tips they depend to survive; single mothers, threatened with eviction unless they have sex with their landlords, and janitorial workers, harassed and assaulted by supervisors, contractors and customers. These are by no means the only women who are, for all intents and purposes, invisible in the literature on sexual harassment; there are others more invisible still, including those in homeless shelters, female arrestees and inmates, childcare and domestic service workers and those who provide various forms of home health care.

These women are the lowest paid workers in the USA: according to the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, agricultural workers average $352 a week and that counts only those who work full time, whereas the minimum wage for restaurant workers is capped by federal law at $2.13. Their jobs are tenuous, their skills fungible and institutional protections few or nonexistent. These women may never tweet; never write an Op-Ed, or appear on a late-night program; indeed, many will never think of themselves as part of the #MeToo movement at all. Yet, their struggle reveals much about the fundamental realities of harassment and resistance.

This paper explores what little is formally known about these women’s experiences; it begins by reviewing the sparse empirical literature as well as the more informal accounts
provided by social justice organizations, investigative journalists and legal commentary with an eye toward making visible the experiences of those who even today remain largely hidden in and from academic discourse and, more largely, the public eye. I then review the surprising success stories that some of these groups have achieved and invite us to ponder what we can learn from them.

Untold stories
Single women in low-income housing

Every month when he come over to get the rent [...] he would say ‘you know, you a single mom, you shouldn’t have to work so hard [...] you wouldn’t have to pay no rent at all if you just let me have a little of that pussy[1].

Research on the issue of sexual harassment in housing is virtually nonexistent. Aside from an occasional law review article, most of what is known about the issue is drawn from the popular media. In the early 1990s, a number of women’s magazines such as Ms., Redbook, Glamour and Jet brought the issue to the attention of their readers (Bode, 1987; Deane, 1992; Gross, 1992); but this brief flurry of publicity dissipated without engaging public or scholarly consciousness in the same way as its workplace counterpart.

In one of the few formal studies, Cahan (1987) surveyed 150 public and private fair housing organizations across the country to examine the extent of the problem. Of those that responded, nearly two-thirds reported receiving complaints of sexual harassment, yielding a total of 288 incidents. Like all studies that base prevalence rates on formal complaints, this is most certainly a drastic under-estimate. The author attempted to correct this problem by extrapolating from reporting rates described in the US Merit Systems Protection Board’s (1981) study, producing an estimate of between 6,818 and 15,000 cases across a five-year period; however, the very different nature of these samples as well as the small number of actual reports renders these estimates suspect and probably unrealistically low (Litt et al., 1992).

Using a different approach, Novac (1994) directly surveyed 1,000 women living in rental households in Ontario, Canada. Of the 352 useable surveys returned, 25 percent of survey respondents reported experiencing residential sexual harassment; however, the survey items were based on a typology of workplace harassment and may not have adequately captured the types of behavior experienced by tenants. For example, Novac (1994) noted that 29 percent of respondents reported that their landlord had entered their home without notice or permission, a behavior not featured in workplace surveys.

Reed et al. (2005) examined the sworn testimony of 39 victims involved in harassment litigation against their landlords with the purpose of determining the nature of their experiences compared to workplace victims. They found that most instances of harassment fit the three general categories found in the workplace (gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion); however, they also identified two additional types of behavior that appear to be unique: home invasion (see Novac, 1994, above) and what they labeled “hostility towards significant others,” usually boyfriends or husbands.

Home invasion refers to instances in which the landlord or property manager would enter the victim’s home uninvited and unannounced, using his key to access the apartment when the victim is home alone; such entries are often the prelude to sexual assault. For example, one victim testified: “He said he come over to fix the sink, but he didn’t have no tools with him. He went down the hall with me and said ‘show me where the sink is broke’ [...] I bent down to show him under the sink. The next thing, he pushed me down. He said ‘I want to fuck your brains out.’ He was grabbing me and pulling my clothes. His pants were down and you could see his penis” (Reed et al., 2005). In other cases, the landlord made clear he did not want other men coming around the tenant, or living in the tenant’s apartment...
(e.g. “I don’t want you having any boyfriends around the apartment”; “The landlord threw the tenant out on the same day that he saw and found out that she had a boyfriend” (Reed et al., 2005, pp. 453-454)).

Nearly a decade later, Tester (2013) reported virtually identical findings. Interestingly, both Tester (2013) and Reed et al. (2005) found that sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention (including assault) were by far the most common forms of harassment in housing; this is in contrast to the repeated finding that gender harassment (hostility) is the most common form of workplace harassment in organizations and sexual coercion the least.

More striking than the prevalence figures and structure of housing harassment, however, is the vulnerability of these women and, by extension, their children. Women constitute the largest subgroup of the nations’ “insecurely housed”[2]; the majority are black or Hispanic single mothers, poorly educated, marginally employed if at all and living at or below the poverty level. These circumstances combined with the dramatically increasing lack of affordable housing[3] produces a virtual formula for harassment by predators who literally hold the keys to women’s homes. Vouchers can be withdrawn on the basis of a complaint by a landlord (e.g. drug use; a boyfriend living in the house), evictions are swift and often brutal; and most victims are unaware of their rights or how to exercise them. One victim who complained to her local Public Housing Authority (PHA) that her landlord was requiring sex from her was simply told to call the police.

Most PHA employees have traditionally received no training on sexual harassment and tenants’ rights; indeed, newspaper accounts make clear that these employees – much like the agricultural foremen discussed above – are often very much part of the problem, either through ignorance or direct participation. As one of Collinsworth et al.’s (2005) victims testified:

[A man] from HUD came out to the house […] and I told him the same thing [I’ve told you.]

Q: And did they do anything in response to your complaint?

A: No. They just said that they was going to work on it.

The next month the tenant was evicted.

A cursory search reveals numerous examples of sexual harassment by housing authority officials themselves; for example, in 2014, the Department of Justice filed a lawsuit alleging that the Section 8 Housing Coordinator for a North Carolina county, along with a Housing Inspector, used their authority to make unwanted sexual comments, sexually touched and made other sexual acts toward women who applied for or received Section 8 housing vouchers; they also retaliated against women who rebuffed their advances. The previous year, a similar suit had been filed against the same two men. One of the most egregious examples involved a hearing officer for the Kansas City Housing Authority; hearing officers assist applicants who have been rejected for public housing to file appeals for reconsideration. In this case, an applicant was discussing her appeal with the hearing officer when “(H)e began telling her that her Facebook pictures were sexy. He then, according to the complaint, unzipped his pants, exposed himself to her, and asked her inappropriate and offensive sexual questions about men’s genitalia” (Mock, 2015).

Agricultural workers

They call it the field de calzon – the field of panties – because so many rapes happen there. (Stone, 2012).

Farm work is considered one of the most dangerous occupations in the USA. In 2016, the average worker earned approximately $12 an hour many considerably less; approximately
26 percent of these workers are women. According to Waugh (2010) most “live far below the poverty thresholds […] Poor nutrition and health, limited access to medical care, exposure to pesticides, and substandard housing are pervasive (Bullock and Lott, 2001; Lott, 2002; Lott and Bullock, 2001, 2007)

The Farmworker Sexual Violence Fact Sheet, published by the Community Alliance for Social Justice in Seattle cites Waugh’s (2010) study among farmworker women finding that 80 percent had experienced sexual harassment at work. Human Rights Watch concluded recently that sexual harassment is so common among agricultural workers in the USA that many see such abuse as an unavoidable condition of the job (HRW, 2012). Among the farmworkers studied by the Southern Poverty Law Center, one described the reality in the fields succinctly: “You allow it or they fire you”. Although the nature of this population, as well as the nature of the work, makes scientific study a challenge, it is clear that the problem is enormous[4] and some researchers, particularly those located in large agricultural regions, have begun to address it.

Waugh (2010) produced one of the only formal social-scientific studies of farm-working immigrant women, studying 150 Mexican immigrant women who worked in the fields and packing sheds of central California. Employing methods developed specifically for assessing harassment among Latina women (Cortina, 2001), combined with qualitative interview techniques, she found that 80 percent of the women farmworkers in her sample had experienced some form of sexual harassment from supervisors or co-workers. Their experiences ranged from crude and offensive verbal behavior through unwanted verbal and physical sexual attention, sexual coercion and sexual assault. Only a very small number ever reported the problem to someone in authority.

Although fear of reporting is the norm for virtually all victims of sexual harassment, the barriers for female agricultural workers are staggering. Employers tend to be white, English-speaking family members who turn over day-to-day farm operations to a foreman, a long-time trusted employee who is bilingual; the workers generally speak little English, the owners rarely speak Spanish, and the bilingual foreman, or “mayor domo,” is thus the single link between the workers and their employer.

It is difficult to over-estimate the power wielded by this individual. “The foreman may, in addition to recruiting and hiring workers, also help find housing, provide transportation to work (usually for a fee), and help newcomers adjust to life in the US. A foreman can have significant authority because he informs workers which fields they should report to and is typically responsible for determining pay” (HRW, 2012). According to William Tomayo, a long-time Regional Attorney for the EEOC: “The workers are geographically isolated from community services, have few options in life and are in desperate poverty. They are dependent on (the foreman) to navigate the English-speaking world for them. If (he) is a predator and/or his supervisors below him are predators, it is the ideal situation for sexual harassment to occur–unfettered, unpunished, and unstopped”. Unlike the more well-studied industrial, bureaucratic and organizational workforces, most harassment of agricultural workers is perpetrated by foremen and supervisors.

Female farmworkers suffer additional vulnerabilities. Although exact figures are hard to come by, it is estimated that 50 percent or more of the agricultural workforce is undocumented, and even those with guest worker visas depend on their employers to remain in the country; importantly, visas are not transferable from one employer to another thus maximizing the “stakes” for holding that particular job and minimizing the likelihood that a worker will complain. Because family members frequently work for the same employer, women who complain risk not only their own job but the jobs of their entire family. Recent immigrants, particularly younger girls and women who speak no English, have little education, and do not understand how to navigate their new situation are at particular risk, as are single women, often with children, who have no husband or male
family member to protect them. Because agricultural workers are exempt from many of the
protections of US labor laws, there is no minimum age for children working on small farms
as long as they have their parents’ permission, and once they are 14, they can work on any
farm even without parental permission.

Farmworkers, by design, were excluded from most of the protections of traditional labor
legislation; some have speculated that, because at the time such legislation was enacted
most farm workers were black, such exclusion represented a conscious attempt to maintain
the social and economic conditions of the Jim Crow South. Although the great majority of
farmworkers are now Hispanic immigrants – up to 50 percent of them undocumented – this
power dynamic remains unchanged: powerless women with few options and much to lose
are sexually assaulted by predatory men with no accountability and little to fear. Although
legalized slavery is long gone from American life[5], its legacy remains powerful in the
fields, orchards and packing sheds of America.

**Janitorial workers**

The fourth assault occurred in a secluded area off the docking area of the mall. (The supervisor)
told (her) that she needed to help him find a gasoline can […] they eventually wound up searching
in a secluded storage area by the loading docks. The supervisor grabbed her by the hair and
pushed her head down, as if he were going to force her to perform oral sex. She said to him
“This again?! Why?” He responded, “Because that’s the way I want it”. [5]

Variously known as janitors, custodians, cleaners, property services workers and more,
janitorial workers are employed in an industry that regularly awards large contracts to the
lowest bidder. This practice produces slim profit margins and a situation in which labor
costs are the main element of profitability, a combination that in turn exerts downward
pressure on wages as well as the financial incentive to skimp on worker protections.

There are literally no formal published studies of this occupational group in the social
science literature, although their isolated, late-night work conditions, low wages and
(mainly) immigrant status create what Chen et al. (2016) refer to as “a perfect storm” of
conditions that place them at risk for sexual assault[6]. Janitorial workers enter empty
shopping malls, high rise office buildings and other commercial structures at night, long
after other workers have left; they work almost always alone, a situation that maximizes the
chances that there will be no one to help them in the event of an attack. Chen et al. note that it
is not unusual for the woman’s only point of contact with her employer to be the supervisor
who is harassing her. Along with this isolation, they identify other risk factors such as
victim vulnerability (arising from undocumented status, language barriers and lack of
knowledge of their rights) and a workplace culture of poorly trained supervisors and
managers, as well as nonexistent sexual harassment policies, that serves to embolden
harassers (Chen et al., 2016, p. 1).

The janitorial profession has changed considerably in the last few generations; until the
1970s, most janitors worked as employees for the stores and facilities they cleaned; as the
landscape became dominated by towering high rises in major (and not so major) American
cities, this business model changed. Large office buildings, typically owned by investment
groups, contain multiple separate companies and firms, each with its own set of offices, who
share services such as cleaning, which are delegated to large property services corporations
who compete for contracts to serve them; such contractors often “piece” such contracts out
to various subcontractors, whose workers may never know or see another employee other
than the supervisor who hires and supervises them. This system of contracting and
subcontracting loosens and blurs lines of employer responsibility.

Large service contractors (e.g. ABM Industries, Service Management Systems) have
traditional corporate structures including a formal HR function, and some are unionized; in
contrast, smaller contractors and subcontractors are often unregistered with the state and do business almost completely “under the table.” Much of the janitorial economy functions almost solely in this “black market.” Although “traditional corporate structures” have not solved the problem of sexual harassment in the industry, as demonstrated by the multiple law suits filed against the major property services companies, these smaller companies often have virtually no hierarchy or structure, the supervisor (or foreman) has unchecked authority to hire and fire, and the protections of traditional labor and civil law go unobserved and are, to many, unknown.

According to the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF) – a California watchdog group that works with janitors – as many as three quarters of janitors experience sexual harassment (Garcia-Brower, 2016 in Chen et al., 2016), virtually all of which goes unreported. Governmental labor law enforcement depends on the assumption that workers know their rights, but because agencies do virtually no outreach, this is often not the case with those who are primed for abuse (language barriers, no education or salable skills, non-documented status). It is these groups who gravitate toward janitorial work, an industry that takes all comers, most of whom have no other options. Many have no idea that there are legal standards governing working hours, breaks, overtime and the like, much less that sexual harassment is illegal and there is something they can do about it. It thus falls to groups like MCTF, which regularly sends outreach investigators on unannounced night-time visits to talk with janitorial workers, win their trust and eventually coax them into a relationship; in this way, the group can “keep tabs” on unfair labor practices (e.g. shortchanging paychecks, no breaks, unpaid overtime) as well as educating and supporting workers who are being exploited. Unfortunately, given the number of buildings that are cleaned every night and the thousands of non-unionized janitors that clean them, there will never be enough labor advocates to identify abusive workplace practices, much less prevent sexual assault.

Restaurant workers

So, it was happy hour, and I went out to the dock and greeted my table and there were three guys, and I’m like, “Hi, my name is Jaclyn,” I introduced myself, the usual, and “What can I get you?” and they were you like, “You, on the table, naked.” (Dirks, 2004).

The restaurant industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the American economy and the all-important “first job” for most young people; it employs nearly 11m people (ROC United, 2014). Restaurants are a subset of the larger hospitality industry (e.g. hotels, resorts and the like), which is itself a subset of the overall service industry, the largest segment of the nation’s economy. The service/hospitality industry has been recognized for at least several decades as a “high risk” industry for sexual harassment and recent research confirms that restaurant employees, in particular, experience harassment as a fact of working life (ROC, 2014). Indeed, the restaurant industry qualifies as the single largest source of sexual harassment claims in the USA; whereas 7 percent of American women work in the restaurant industry, more than one-third (37 percent) of all sexual harassment claims to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission arise from restaurant employees (Tahmincioglu, 2011). In ROC’s (2014) study of restaurant employees, the most comprehensive to date, the highly sexualized environment in which restaurant workers labor affected every major workplace relationship, with 80 percent of restaurant workers reporting harassment from co-workers and 66 percent from restaurant management; 78 percent had experienced harassment from customers.

As elsewhere, women bear the brunt of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry. Over two-thirds (69 percent) of women in this study reported sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions from co-workers, and 39 percent were deliberately touched or
pinched; 21 percent were inappropriately kissed or fondled. Women were also more likely to receive sexually suggestive text messages from co-workers (19 percent), sexually suggestive looks or gestures (45 percent) and pressure for dates (36 percent). The numbers for men were considerably lower, though still higher than those reported in other industries.

Researchers and activists have posited a number of reasons for the high levels of harassment in the restaurant industry. ROC (2014) emphasizes the vulnerability inherent in tipped occupations, including the little-known fact that, in 1976, at the behest of the National Restaurant Association, federal legislation capped the minimum wage for tipped workers at $2.13 an hour, where it has remained for the past 40 years! These “wages” go almost exclusively to pay social security and employment taxes; as a result, servers and other tipped workers typically receive no pay check, but rather a paystub for $0 marked “THIS IS NOT A PAYCHECK” (Jayaraman, 2016) an unsubtle reminder that their livelihood is completely dependent on the goodwill and generosity of their customers.

The perverse nature of such incentives is obvious. Not only do managers encourage servers to flirt and dress to emphasize their “assets” to customers, often requiring them to don skimpy or sexualized uniforms, but servers themselves can come to internalize the commodification of their bodies (Dirks, 2004). ROC reported that restaurant workers in sub-minimum wage tipped jobs experienced twice the amount of sexual harassment as those living in states that pay the same minimum wage to all workers. Interestingly, this finding held not only for harassment from customers but also for that by co-workers and managers. Clearly, there are additional factors at play other than the perverse combination of a sub-minimum wages and tips.

One possible candidate is the nature of restaurant work itself; the sexualized workplace culture often found in restaurants can “normalize” the sexualization of female workers, creating the tolerant organizational environment long implicated by organizational psychologists as the main precursor of sexual harassment (Hulin et al., 1996; Willness et al., 2007). Of course, not all eating establishments are the same; not only do they vary by type (fast food, family chains (e.g. Olive Garden, Applebee’s), fine dining (e.g. Capitol Grille, Morton’s)) but they also exist on intersecting continua of the degree and nature of customer interaction and the degree of overt sexualization. For example, employees of McDonald’s and similar fast food chains have only brief, highly transactional interactions with customers that do not lend themselves to harassment in the same way as the more personalized interactions common to, say, TGI Fridays; the nature of McDonald’s atmosphere is also considerably more prosaic and family-oriented. This is not to say that fast food employees are not harassed; but rather that customer harassment is less likely to be as widespread. This is in contrast to “party chains” such as TGI Fridays, through the “sanitized” sexuality of bars and grills such as Hooters and resort-type establishments in tourist playgrounds; to the euphemistically named “gentlemen’s clubs” such as Solid Gold, Platinum Plus and the like. It is reasonable to suggest that this continuum of sexualization influences the degree to which female servers will be objectified and harassed by all manner of other employees, not just customers.

Other scholars point to the vulnerability-related characteristics of service workers themselves; that is, under-educated, low skilled, highly fungible and mainly female, particularly at lower levels. In addition, restaurant staff are often gender-segregated, both horizontally and vertically; women tend to occupy jobs that are considered lower-status and are rarely found in “men’s work” – for instance, they are concentrated in waitress and hostess positions as opposed to management or sommeliers in fine dining – and also set off from male co-workers through practices such as the requirement to wear revealing clothes or uniforms, the expectation that they will flirt with customers as part of their job (particularly servers) and the common perception that whatever work women do is less skilled or valuable. As ROC (2014) points out, sexual harassment is both a form of this social distancing and a result of it.
The promise of collective action: “the times, they are a-changin”

Williams et al. (1999) set out to determine how organizations could reduce sexual harassment; they operationalized organizational climate via examining actual organizational practices, including worker education (e.g. training), the provision of resources (e.g. hotlines, counseling) and policy implementation (both prevention and enforcement activities) in a sample of more than 22,000 members of the armed forces, both women and men. They found that the only set of practices that reduced sexual harassment involved implementation, that is, tangible actions to prevent harassing behavior and enforce sanctions against those who harassed others. Although training and the provision of resources had a minor effect on incidence rates, these were weak, inconsistent and accounted for very little variance. Implementation, on the other hand, had a strong linear relationship with harassment rates; the more effort the organization (in this case, various military units) put into tangible efforts to prevent harassment and sanction those who engaged in it, the less harassment occurred, accounting for an astonishing 14 percent of the variance of harassment rates in the female sample. Unfortunately, nearly 20 years later, organizations of all kinds continue to place their emphasis on devising policies and implementing training. One dramatic exception has recently appeared, however, and that in a most unlikely setting.

The coalition of Immokalee workers (CIW)

The CIW is a worker-based human rights organization built on farmworker community organizing and headquartered in Immokalee, Florida, the center of Florida’s huge tomato-growing industry. In 2011, CIW initiated the Campaign for Fair Food Program (FFP); under this program, a coalition of farmworkers, along with a national network of consumers, convinced large-scale corporate consumers (e.g. Whole Foods, Wal-Mart, McDonald’s) to partner with them to create structural change. According to the FFP (2017) annual report: “(Stores) agree to purchase covered produce only from farms that meet the standards required by the Fair Food Code of Conduct, as verified by the Fair Food Standards Council (FFSC).” They also pay their suppliers a small “Fair Food Premium,” known popularly as a “penny-per pound,” which is then passed on to farmworkers in their regular paychecks to augment low wages:

Growers agree to implement the Fair Food Code of Conduct on their farms, to cooperate with monitoring by the FFSC, and to pass along the Fair Food Premium. Farms that fail to come into compliance with Code standards are suspended from the Program until they do so and cannot sell their product to Participating Buyers during that time.

In the brief six years of its existence, this program has created a remarkable record of success in improving all aspects of farmworkers lives; the Fair Food Code of Conduct, drafted by farmworkers themselves, requires among other things a strict anti-harassment, pro-respect policy with comprehensive education, a safe and effective complaint process, and strong anti-retaliation provisions that are strictly enforced; each year, the grower is audited for compliance by the Standards Council. Requirements for continued participation include complying with the Zero Tolerance policy for forced labor, child labor, physical violence and sexual assault. Sexual harassment that includes touching is cause for immediate dismissal and a year-long ban on employment by any participating grower; a second offense results in a lifetime ban. The process is monitored by the Standards Council, which conducts a yearly audit. According to its 2017 Annual Report, “Cases of sexual harassment by supervisors with any type of physical contact have been virtually eliminated, with only one such case found since 2013.”

This is a remarkable record, unmatched by any other organization or group. The power of such comprehensive implementation, enhanced by strong accountability and tangible consequences, has not only dramatically reduced incidence rates but improved the quality of working life on a large scale. Along the way, it has provided strong “real life” evidence for the validity and generalizability of traditional theoretical models of sexual harassment in organizations.
Other worker-based initiatives

The Immokalee Collective is the most well developed but not the only worker-based initiative of its type. After the (2015) Frontline documentary “Rape on the Night Shift” exposed widespread rape and sexual assault in the janitorial industry, female members of the Service Employees International Union worked to pass a California legislative initiative mandating in-person training for all janitorial workers every two years, training that deals specifically with the power dynamics and culture of the industry, with an emphasis on peer-to-peer training. The narrative of their struggle, from the initial attempts to convince their male peers of the importance of this issue to their dramatic six-day hunger strike on the front lawn of the California capitol, has been documented by Yeung (2018b).

Meanwhile, far from the West Coast, a group of hotel janitors successfully lobbied the Chicago City Council for a city ordinance mandating that all hotel room attendants be issued a “panic button,” a button fob to wear around their neck on a lanyard, plus an iPod that interacts with the hotel’s existing communication system to track their location. As reported by Elejalde-Ruiz, the ordinance also requires hotels to maintain written policies that encourage workers to report incidents of sexual harassment by guests and lay out procedures that will be followed when they do. The policies must state workers can leave the area where they feel endangered and be reassigned to work away from the offending guest, without fear of retaliation from their employer.

A key aspect of such worker-based advocacy is the utilization of “on the ground” knowledge to develop solutions keyed to the specifics of the relevant industry. The panic buttons and tracking systems that promise greater safety for room attendants are relatively useless for restaurant workers and servers whose greatest hazards often play out publicly and in full view of others. Identifying one core industry problem as the two-tiered wage system that relegates some workers to the extraordinary vulnerability that comes with being forced to live off tips, ROC United is waging a One Fair Wage campaign[7] that would raise the lower minimum wage of tipped workers to match the regular minimum wage, while still allowing tipping to continue. ROC is also enlisting both restaurant owners and diners in this struggle, a strategy they refer to as “surrounding the industry”; their Diners United program engages consumers to patronize and support “high road” restaurants in various ways, including a free downloadable Dining Guide app to investigate and rate restaurants. Their effort to engage workers, owners and diners in a comprehensive movement for change recalls the Immokalee Collective’s tripartite focus on workers, growers and large-scale produce consumers, designed to improve farm workers’ lives by comprehensively changing the culture of the industry.

Low-income tenants: a counter example

Despite some indication that governmental indifference to the plight of the precariously housed may be changing, signs of similar progress for this group are notably absent from this list of nascent success stories. In October 2017, The Justice Department launched a pilot program to combat sexual harassment in housing in Washington, DC and Virginia. HUD has issued its first set of guidelines on sexual harassment in housing, and while this paper was being written, DoJ and HUD joined forces to promote interagency cooperation on this issue. The two agencies have distributed a brief educational video to all public housing authorities in the country, as well as a Public Service Announcement to raise awareness and make it easier for victims to report harassment and find resources to help them.

It remains to be seen how effective these efforts will be. Although any progress is better than the silence and neglect that for years have shrouded the exploitation of women in their own homes, research has shown that informational and resource-based initiatives have limited impact on reducing harassment (Williams et al., 1999) and there is so far no sign of any tenant-based advocacy effort that might mirror the success of worker-based groups.
This is, perhaps, not surprising, given not only the extreme vulnerability and powerlessness of these women but also the lack of any sense of the group consciousness that appears to drive worker-based movements. Not only is the relationship to one’s abode (e.g. tenant, owner) largely incidental to one’s identity, but the material realities of these women’s lives provide little basis for group consciousness. With the increasing demise of mass urban housing projects, poor women increasingly reside, disconnected from one another, in privately-owned apartments and houses, at the mercy of individual “slum lords” and without the focal connection of shared experience that can lead to action. If there is a single lesson to be learned from the stories of the disparate groups discussed above, it appears to be the powerful reminder that unity makes for strength, and that collective consciousness can provide strong impetus for collective action. Indeed, it is that very consciousness that is embodied in the slogan #MeToo.

Concluding thoughts
Too many have been left behind in the whirl of publicity that has attended the victimization of famous women and the fall of powerful men. This is ironic, in that the original founder of #MeToo, Black activist Tarana Burke, began her career as a teenager working with girls in marginalized communities. Even as we celebrate the bravery and strength of those who risked so much to come forward, it is important that the glamour of Hollywood and its associated celebrity not blind us to the experiences of these unseen women. Otherwise, we risk replicating the mistakes of Second-wave feminists in the “1960s” and “1970s” who, with the best intentions in the world, were nevertheless blind to the vulnerability and oppression of their sisters of color and other women disadvantaged by race and class. This necessarily brief and narrow look into the lives of unseen women reminds us not only that they have stories to tell, but that we have much to learn.

Notes
1. Deposition in a housing sexual harassment case; original on file with the author.
2. Although definitions differ, it is generally agreed to refer to lack of security in an individual shelter that is the result of high housing costs relative to income, poor housing quality, unstable neighborhoods, overcrowding and/or homelessness.
3. See the 2017 Frontline documentary “Rape in the Fields” for a graphic account; more generally, see Yeung (2018a, b) for a compelling and comprehensive discussion of female agricultural workers and “invisible” women more generally. This paper owes much to her groundbreaking account; I am deeply grateful for our enlightening conversations.
4. Although not the subject of this paper, modern-day slavery in the form of labor trafficking is far from unknown in the agricultural fields of America; labor traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion (including isolation in labor camps, debt bondage, exorbitant recruitment fees and outright violence) to force victims to provide labor services against their will. No one knows how widespread this form of exploitation is; the Human Trafficking Hotline annual report indicates receiving over 30,000 substantive reports in 2016; the agricultural industry has been identified as at high risk for labor trafficking. https://humantraffickinghotline.org/labor-trafficking-venuesindustries/agriculture, downloaded, accessed September 14, 2018.
5. Excerpt from court document; original on file with the author.
7. ROC’s activism reaches far beyond the One Fair Wage program; a comprehensive description of their activities can be found at https://rocunited.org
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Further reading


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Dual effects of self-focused and other-focused power on sexual harassment intentions

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine two forms of power construal – self-focused and other-focused power – on effects of increasing or decreasing sex-based harassment (SBH) tendencies through feeling states triggered by imagining these different types of power. In addition, dispositional traits associated with either self- and other-focused power were tested as moderators of these paths.

Design/methodology/approach – An online experiment was conducted with 549 US adults (58 percent men) who were randomly assigned to imagine themselves with self-focused power, other-focused power or control. Dispositional measures were completed before priming; and feelings of sexiness, powerfulness and communalism were completed after priming. Then, participants completed either modified versions of Pryor’s (1987) Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale or Williams et al.’s (2017) Workplace Crush Scenario.

Findings – Moderated indirect effects indicated that self-focused power increased participants’ feelings of sexiness and powerfulness, which, in turn, increased either measure of SBH. However, these indirect effects were only significant for individuals low in Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy). Surprisingly, other-focused power priming indirectly increased SBH tendencies through communal feelings.

Research limitations/implications – Moral licensing may explain the unexpected effect of other-focused power on SBH. Organizational leaders should monitor the damaging effects of both forms of power.

Originality/value – This is the first study to examine how both negative and positive power construals affect harassment tendencies and to document potential nefarious effects for both types of power.

Keywords Sexual harassment, Power, Dark Triad, Dominance, Agentic goal orientation, Communal goal orientation

Paper type Research paper

You know, I’m automatically attracted to beautiful – I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. (Donald Trump – transcript of Access Hollywood Tape, New York Times, October 7)

Since being named in the mid-1970s, there has been substantial research about the forms, prevalence, antecedents and effects of sexual harassment (now sex-based harassment (SBH); see Berdahl, 2007; e.g. McDonald, 2012; Willness et al., 2007). As exemplified by Donald Trump’s bravado captured by the Access Hollywood Tape, power has been a central organizing principle in understanding why, by whom and toward whom SBH is targeted (e.g. MacKinnon, 1979; Uggen and Blackstone, 2004), and has catalyzed the current #MeToo movement. SBH is understood to be perpetuated, tolerated and maintained by a socioeconomic system that privileges men’s power over women (Uggen and Blackstone, 2004).
Conduct initiated by individuals in a more powerful position than the target(s) is perceived (Stockdale, Vaux, and Cashin, 1995) and experienced (Settles et al., 2011) as more harassing and more serious than similar behavior initiated by peers. Threats to initiators’ status (a form of power) create an impetus to harass (Berdahl, 2007; Maass et al., 2003). For men with a proclivity to harass or sexually aggress, priming feelings of power heightens the association with sex, and increases sexual attraction toward an attractive female subordinate (Bargh et al., 1995).

Sources of power may arise from, among other things, roles (e.g. supervisors), control of rewards, punishments or other valued resources, cultural values and physical strength. We focus our lens on feelings of power and how it triggers cognitive, affective and behavioral processes to produce SBH. Building on Kipnis’ notion of the metamorphic effects of power (Kipnis et al., 1976), in which feeling powerful exaggerates one’s self-view while diminishing the view of others, our aim is to develop a theoretical framework that explains how the possession of power enhances affective linkages that catalyzes SBH.

We also consider power as a potential source of doing good rather than just a source of corruption. Specifically, feeling powerful may also increase feelings of responsibility for subordinates and for enhancing the well-being of others (Winter, 1991). Responsibility-based power motives have been characterized as ownership of one’s behavior, dependability, impulse control and making moral judgments (Winter, 1991). Furthermore, responsibility and caring for others is also at the heart of modern theories of effective leadership, including servant leadership and transformational leadership (Eagly et al., 2003; van Dierendonck, 2011). We propose that potential effects of responsibility-based power, which we refer to as “other-focused power,” may mitigate the effects of power on proclivity to engage in SBH.

Following a brief theoretical overview of power, and a review of empirical studies of power-related effects on harassing conduct or tendencies, we present a study testing the effects of two types of power construal – self-focused and other-focused – on the likelihood or reduction in Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH). We posit that whereas self-focused power increases SBH tendencies through enhanced feelings of sexiness and powerfulness, other-focused power decreases SBH tendencies through enhanced feelings of responsibility and connectedness to others. We also examine moderators of these effects. Our conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1 and discussed below.

Theoretical overview and hypotheses
Approach/inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) focuses on the activation of underlying cognitive, affective and behavioral mechanisms when individuals gain power (as well as the

![Figure 1. Hypothesized model for the effects of power priming (vs control: Contrast 1) and other-focused power (vs self-focused power: Contrast 2) on SBH intentions, mediated by sexy-powerful feelings, moderated by traits and goal orientations.](image-url)
inhibition of these systems when power is restricted). Specifically, Keltner et al. (2003) argued that feeling powerful activates an unconscious system that turns one’s attention toward seeking rewards (such as sex), feeling positive emotions and behaving in a disinhibited and trait-consistent manner, among other effects. The implications for understanding socially inappropriate behavior, such as SBH, flows easily from this theory: individuals who are dispositionally sensitive to power are disinhibited from pursuing sex-related goals and objectifying their targets in sexist ways when primed to feel powerful (Galinsky et al., 2003; Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Several studies have demonstrated the activating effects of power on inappropriate and socially irresponsible thoughts and behaviors (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002), including SBH (e.g. Bargh and Raymond, 1995; Diehl et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2017) and other sex-related perceptions and actions.

We anticipate that priming individuals to feel powerful will increase positive affect, as predicted by the approach/inhibition theory of power (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003). Furthermore, self-focused power activates an approach system when individuals are primed to feel powerful in a way that enhances their esteem and feelings of personal effectiveness for their own interests. This should increase feelings of powerfulness and sexiness (Bargh et al., 1995; Pryor and Stoller, 1994). Moreover, self-focused power should disinhibit individuals from relatively taboo conduct, particularly SBH:

H1. Self-focused power priming (compared to other conditions) increases likelihood to engage in SBH, mediated by feelings of powerfulness and sexiness.

We further propose that traits associated with power and self-focus will moderate these mediated paths. Approach/inhibition theory specifies that power activates dispositional traits and energizes goal-seeking behavior consistent with those traits (Keltner et al., 2003), which has been supported in prior research (Kraus et al., 2011). Thus, self-focused power should exacerbate influences of power-centric personality traits such as dominance (characterized by controlling others, self-assuredness and assertiveness; Buss and Craik, 1980), agentic goal orientation (pursuit of power, status and recognition; Diekman et al., 2011), and Dark Triad traits (composed of Machiavellianism (manipulative tendencies), narcissism (self-centeredness) and psychopathy (anti-social behavior); Paulus and Williams, 2002). Dark Triad traits have been associated with sexual manipulativeness and SBH (Jonason et al., 2009; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016).

We predict that enhancing individuals’ sense of self-focused power, especially those high on power-related traits, will magnify their feelings of power and sexiness, ultimately increasing their likelihood of engaging in SBH. However, it is also possible that self-focused power priming may have stronger effects on those who are low on these traits. Williams et al. (2017) found that acute feelings of power may unleash powerful (and related) feelings among those who perceive themselves to be chronically low in power. Specifically, Williams et al. reasoned that sudden feelings of powerfulness among those who are chronically less powerful may result in aggressive behavior or inclinations, including sexual harassment. Therefore, we leave open the possibility that power priming may have stronger effects on feelings of powerfulness and related affective states (sexiness, positive affect) for people who are normally low on traits related to power (Williams et al., 2017):

H2. Trait dominance, agentic goal orientation and Dark Triad traits will moderate the mediated relationship between self-focused power priming (compared to other conditions) and likelihood to engage in SBH (see Figure 1 for a conceptual model).

Power also has a more positive construal. For some, feeling powerful heightens a sense of responsibility for others (Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Overbeck and Park, 2001), which is associated with socially responsible behavior and other prosocial tendencies (e.g. Chen et al.,
For example, empowered communally oriented participants (e.g., who are responsive to others’ needs), compared to empowered exchange-oriented participants (e.g., who are responsive to “tit-for-tat” relationship balances), took on more responsibility for completing a task rather than assigning that responsibility to a study partner (Chen et al., 2001). In addition, individuals empowered with a sense of responsibility toward others were more likely to intervene when they encountered an act of incivility, compared to non-empowered individuals (Hershcovis et al., 2017).

Consistent with a central thesis of approach/inhibition theory that power catalyzes actors to pursue trait-consistent goals (Chen et al., 2001; Keltner et al., 2003; Kraus et al., 2011), it follows that priming other-focused power should enhance feelings of connectedness to others (i.e., communal feelings; Bakan, 1966), especially among those with a communal goal orientation. Diekman and her colleagues (Diekman et al., 2010, 2011) defined communal goal orientation as a propensity to care for others (cf. Clark et al., 1987). Past research has found that personality characteristics that are similar to communal constructs, such as agreeableness (Larrimer-Scherbaum and Popovich, 2001) and honesty-humility (Lee et al., 2003), are negatively related to the LSH. Therefore, if communal feelings are activated by priming other-focused power, it follows that actors should be less inclined to engage in sex harassing behavior, particularly for individuals who endorse a communal goal orientation. We hypothesize that priming “other-focused” power will decrease the likelihood of engaging in SBH, mediated by communal feelings and moderated by communal goal orientation:

H3. Other-focused power priming (compared to other conditions) decreases likelihood to engage in SBH, mediated by feelings of communalism.

H4. Communal goal orientation will moderate the mediated effects of other-focused power priming (compared to other conditions) on suppressing the likelihood to engage in SBH (see Figure 1 for a conceptual model).

Method
Participants
An initial sample of 733 heterosexual US adult Amazon MTurk workers participated in this study. Heterosexual orientation was a qualifying condition because the SBH measures assessed intention to harass a person of the opposite sex. Eliminating those who did not meet age (18 or over), sexual orientation or location (USA) qualifications (n = 181), or who completed the study in under five minutes (n = 3) left us with a final sample of 549 participants. Of these, 317 (58 percent) identified as male (232 as female, 42 percent), and 320 (58 percent) were single (222 married, 40 percent and 7 indicated “other,” 1 percent). Most identified as white (411, 75 percent), followed by black (99, 18 percent), Asian/Asian American (31, 6 percent) and American Indian/Alaskan Native (16, 3 percent). Participants received $1.50 for completing the study, which was designed to be completed in under 30 min.

Measures
Scaling information and reliabilities for all measures are displayed in Table I of the Results section.

Methods and Materials
Disposition scales. Trait dominance was measured with the 16 dominance and reverse-coded submissive items from the Revised Interpersonal Adjectives Scale (Wiggins et al., 1988). We used the Short Dark Triad (SD3) instrument to measure Dark Triad traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy (Jones and Paulhus, 2014). We created a
single Dark Triad scale by averaging the three Dark Triad trait scales, which has been validated in prior research (McLarnon and Tarraf, 2017). Communal goal orientation reflects interest in connecting with others, which may be enhanced by situational factors, such as being in an occupation that affords those goals (Diekman et al., 2011). We measured communal goal orientation with the six-item scale developed by Diekman et al. (2010) (e.g. rate the importance of serving community as a goal for you). Agentic goal orientation reflects interests in pursuing goals related to mastery, power, novelty and excitement (Diekman et al., 2010). We used Diekman et al.’s (2010) 14-item agentic goals scale (e.g. rate the importance of power as a goal for you). We factor analyzed the 20-item communal and agentic goal orientation items and found support for a three-factor model (with a varimax rotation). The communal items loaded on a single factor with loadings above 0.40, but the agentic items loaded on two separate factors. The first of these factors contained the items associated with power (power, recognition, status, focus on the self, success, financial reward, self-direction, self-promotion and competition). The second contained items associated with achievement (achievement, mastery, independence and demonstrating skill). Because of our interested in power-related agentic goal orientation, we used the items from the first agentic subscale as our measure of agentic goal orientation. Each disposition scale was created by unit weighting and averaging the items on their respective scales. Internal reliability estimates for these and the remaining self-report scales were 0.78 or greater and are reported in Table I.

State feelings. After reading one of the priming scenarios, participants rated their current feelings. Feelings of state positive and negative affect (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) were measured to validate the expectation that power priming increases positive affect (Keltner et al., 2003). The communal feelings scale was adapted from the communal goal orientation scale described above, but modified to reflect participants’ feelings about themselves after reading their scenario. Hence, participants rated on a scale from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (very much), the extent to which they felt caring, helpful, connected to others, altruistic, responsible for others after a day like the one described in their scenario. Similarly, powerful feelings reflected items from the agentic-power goal scale described above: powerful, competitive, deserving recognition, high status and distinctive, rated on the same scale as communal feelings. Finally, sexy feelings was developed by the authors, and included feelings of being sexy, attractive, desirable, hot and appealing. We factor analyzed items from the communal, powerful and sexy feelings scales (principal axis factoring with varimax rotation) and found a two-factor model with
powerful and sexy feelings items loading on one scale (accounting for 31 percent of variance) and communal feelings items loading on the second scale (accounting for 21 percent of variance). We retained these two scales for the analyses, labeled sexy-powerful feelings and communal feelings, respectively. Items from all the feeling state measures, including the PANAS, were presented in a random order. Each state scale was created by unit weighting and averaging the items on their respective scales. We modified $H1$ and $H2$ to test the indirect effect of power priming on SBH intentions through sexy-powerful feelings, moderated by dominance, Dark Triad and agentic goal orientation.

**SBH intentions.** We included two measures of likelihood to engage in SBH, on which participants were randomly assigned to respond to one, thus creating a replication design. The first was a shortened version of Pryor’s (1987) LSH Scale (Scenarios 5, 6, 8 and 10). We shortened the measure to lessen the possibility of survey fatigue, and we used domain sampling to select scenarios that represented the range of situations reflected in the original LSH (entertainment industry, university setting, publishing contract and personnel selection decision). Each scenario describes a situation in which a powerful person is interacting with a less powerful person of the opposite sex, setting up the potential for the powerful individual to engage in SBH. We also created a parallel female version by changing the sex of the initiator to female and the target to male. The LSH scale is the average of ratings on one of the three follow-up questions on each scenario asking the likelihood that the participant (the initiator) would ask for sexual favors from the target individual. In this regard, the LSH is a measure of the intention to engage in *quid pro quo* SBH (tit for tat, also known as sexual coercion; Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Our second measure of SBH was a shortened version of Williams et al.’s (2017) Workplace Crush Scenario (WCS), with both male and female versions. In this measure, participants are asked to read a scenario in which they have a crush on an opposite sex team member, who is not responding to their flirting, and to assume that both they and the object of their crush were secure in their work positions. Participants rated how likely they would engage in various actions toward their crush object. These actions reflected various forms of unwanted sexual attention forms of SBH (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). The original WCS contained 41 inappropriate and 9 appropriate items. To reduce survey fatigue, we used domain sampling to select ten inappropriate items representing the range of behaviors on the scale, such as “I will continue to ask Melanie/Matt on dates even after she/he has said no”; and four appropriate behaviors, such as “I will start dressing more nicely at work than I did before.” WCS is the average of ratings of the inappropriate items.

**Power prime scenarios.** In previous research, power priming has ranged from giving participants the ability to control valued resources (e.g. Anderson and Berdahl, 2002), putting them in a supervisory role (e.g. Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014), instructing participants to remember a time when they were powerful (e.g. Galinsky et al., 2003) and subliminally presenting power cues (e.g. Bargh et al., 1995). Our interest was in priming feelings of self-focused or other-focused power. We conducted pilot tests to evaluate the effectiveness of different methods for priming feelings of powerfulness, but methods of priming powerful feelings used in prior research (e.g. Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003) were not effective.

Specifically, similar to Chen et al. (2001), we conducted a pilot study with 96 US MTurk participants (70 percent male, average age = 33.17, SD = 11.72), in which participants were primed to think about being powerful and controlling others; being powerful and feeling responsible for others; or groceries and grocery shopping (control). Then they completed a word fragment test. Priming should have led to higher rates of word
completions that were consistent with their prime (e.g. if primed to feel powerful and controlling others, the fragment _OLD would be completed as BOLD more often than if primed with the other conditions). However, we found no significant differences in the number of priming-consistent word completions by priming condition for power words, F (2, 93) = 0.47, p = 0.625; sex words (predicted to be higher in the power-control priming condition), F (2, 93) = 0.78, p = 0.462; or responsibility words, F (2, 93) = 0.59, p = 0.559. We also attempted a pilot study where participants (100 US Mturk participants, 64 percent male, average age = 33.42, SD = 11.44) would write about a time when they felt powerful in a way where they controlled others, powerful in a way where they had responsibility over others, or to write about the last time they went grocery shopping (Galinsky et al., 2003), and then complete ratings of their feelings of powerful, sexy and communal feelings. However, a large percentage of the participants (47 percent) had uninterpretable essays; therefore, we abandoned this priming method.

In a third pilot test (110 US MTurk participants, 62 percent male, average age = 35 (SD = 12.67)), we found that using scenarios which asked participants to imagine themselves in situations where they possessed either self-focused power, other-focused power or a control condition in which there were no power cues predicted significant effects on feelings of powerlessness, F (2, 107) = 4.88, p = 0.009. Powerful feelings were higher in the self-focused power scenario condition, M = 3.78, SD = 0.97, than in the other-focused power scenario condition, (M = 3.17, SD = 1.01) and control scenario condition (M = 3.21, SD = 0.78). The scenario condition also had significant effects on communal feelings as hypothesized, F (2, 107) = 5.01, p = 0.008, with higher communal feelings in the other-focused scenario condition (M = 3.58, SD = 0.88) than in the self-focused scenario condition (M = 2.91, SD = 1.04). Communal feelings in the control condition were not significantly different from either of the power conditions (M = 3.26, SD = 0.95). Therefore, we utilized these scenarios in our main study.

The self-focused power scenario was written to induce a feeling of being powerful by providing cues in the scenario related to feeling powerful, including focusing on the individual’s self-view, being efficacious (Bandura, 1982), administering a negative employment consequence to a subordinate (Tjosvold, 1995) and drinking alcohol (e.g. Wiers et al., 2009). It read as follows:

Today you woke up feeling refreshed and you look particularly attractive and fit. You glanced in the mirror on the way out the door and noticed that your hair looks great. At work, you met with a group of senior leaders to pitch a proposal for an important strategic initiative that, if successful, will not only significantly increase the firm’s profitability, but will also position you for a significant promotion. One of the senior leaders listening to your pitch was expressing skepticism about your proposal and was asking very challenging questions. At first, you were not sure how to respond, but then you found your stride and were able to give convincing, persuasive replies to his questions. You could see by the looks on others’ faces that you had nailed it.

Later in the day, you finished your performance reviews of your direct reports. One of them has been off the mark all year and hasn’t hit their numbers. You decided that it’s time for this employee to consider a different career path, so you recommended that they be terminated from their current position. You know that the firm cannot afford to string along people like this who are not making a contribution.

After work, you had a beer with your administrative assistants, Kathy and Mark, at the bar on the first floor of your building.

The other-focused power scenario was written to induce a sense of power with pride and responsibility toward the team and others more generally. Although written to be parallel to the self-focused power scenario, the elements of power in this scenario involved prosocial
goals (Sassenberg et al., 2012), such as caring for others, considering team goals and engaging in mentoring behaviors. It read as follows:

Today you woke up feeling refreshed, took a 30-minute walk with your dog, and made sure you scheduled his vet appointment. At work, you met with a group of senior leaders to pitch a proposal for an important strategic initiative that, if successful, will not only significantly help the firm reach its goal to be a “best place to work”, but it will also position your team members for important engagements in the future, which will be great for their careers. One of the senior leaders listening to your pitch expressed skepticism about your proposal and asked very challenging questions. At first, you were not sure how to respond, but then you found your stride and were able to show how the strategic initiative will benefit everyone in the firm as well as the firm’s clients. You could see by the looks on others’ faces that they were impressed by how deeply you were thinking about your team and the firm as a whole.

Later in the day, you finished your performance reviews of your direct reports. One of them has been off the mark all year and hasn’t hit their numbers. You decided that you are going to give them extra attention and mentoring so they have a better understanding of how to better leverage their true talents. You know that the firm really values leaders who take personal responsibility for the professional development of their mentees.

After work you had an ice tea with your administrative assistants, Kathy and Mark, at the cafe on the first floor of your building.

The control scenario was written to avoid inducing power and to appear as a normal working day. It read:

Today you woke up and rolled out of bed. You read the newspaper for 30 minutes. You showered and got dressed. At work, you met with a group of senior leaders to listen to a pitch of a proposal for an important strategic initiative that, if successful, will not only significantly help the firm reach its goals, but will also make the firm more profitable. One of the senior leaders listening to the pitch expressed skepticism about the proposal and asked very challenging questions. At first, the presenter was not sure how to respond, but then they found their stride and gave convincing responses. You could see by the looks on others’ faces that they are impressed with the presenter.

Later in the day, you finish your performance reviews of your direct reports. One of them has been off the mark all year and hasn’t hit their numbers. You decide that you are going to set this review aside and work on it another day.

After work, you had an ice tea at the cafe on the first floor of your building.

Procedure. The entire study was conducted online using the Qualtrics survey platform. Participants were led to believe that the study was about personality and leadership. After completing qualification questions, reading the informed consent form and agreeing to participate in the study, participants first completed the disposition scales, with scale items presented in random order. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three power prime scenario conditions. After reading and reflecting on their respective scenario, they completed the state feeling scales. In order to disguise that the purpose of the study was about sex harassment, participants were then told they would be randomly assigned to a scenario about workplace situations (financial decisions or interpersonal situations). In fact, all participants were assigned to the interpersonal situations in which they were randomly assigned to complete either the LSH or the WCS scale. After completing the study, participants were debriefed about the true purpose of the study and were given resources to learn more about sexual harassment.

Results
Effects of power priming and self-focused vs other on SBH through communal goal orientation
Table I provides means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and reliabilities for the study variables by SBH measure condition, as well as reliabilities from the full sample. LSH and
WCS scale ratings were strongly correlated with positive affect and the dispositional ratings of agentic goal orientation, Dark Triad and to a lesser extent communal goal orientation (positively) and dominance (negatively, but only in the LSH sample). These SBH measures were also strongly correlated with the proposed affective mediators of sexy-powerful and communal feelings.

Table II presents the means of the proposed mediators and the two measures of SBH by the SBH sample. One-way ANOVAs of priming condition were conducted on each of these variables with Tukey HSD post hoc tests when the F was significant. In both samples, self-focused and other-focused power priming increased positive affect, compared to the control condition, supporting the approach/inhibition theory that feeling powerful increases positive feelings (Keltner et al., 2003). Self-focused power tended to increase sexy-powerful feelings the most compared to the other priming conditions. In the WCS sample, other-focused power significantly increased communal feelings compared to self-focused power and the control prime. Together with the results presented in Table I, these preliminary findings support mediation analysis.

Hypothesis testing

To test the main hypotheses, we used Hayes’ Process Macro version 3.0 (Hayes, 2017) to test first test simple mediation (Process Model 4) and then moderated mediation paths (Process Model 7) between the priming scenarios and SBH ratings, mediated by various state feelings and moderated by various dispositional characteristics and participant sex. Indirect effects were estimated through a 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval with 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2017). The Process software created two contrast variables for the IV (priming conditions). Contrast 1 compared the power primes (coded as 0.33) to the control condition (coded as −0.67). Contrast 2 compared the self-focused power prime (0.5) to the other-focused power prime (−0.5). These analyses were conducted separately for the subsample that completed the LSH measure and the sample that completed the WCS measure of SBH.

Effects of power priming on SBH through sexy-powerful feelings

H1 focused on the effect of self-focused power on the SBH measures mediated by sexy-powerful feelings. We first examined simple mediation models without moderators. The first model predicted LSH from the contrast variables representing the power priming conditions through sexy-powerful feelings. Figure 2 depicts the paths in this model. Contrast 1 was significantly related to sexy-powerful feelings (β = 0.33, p < 0.007) indicating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-focused power</th>
<th>Other-focused power</th>
<th>Control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I. LSH sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td>3.75&lt;sub&gt;a,b&lt;/sub&gt; (0.89)</td>
<td>3.93&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (0.67)</td>
<td>3.54&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.79)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexy-power feelings</td>
<td>3.45&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (0.92)</td>
<td>3.16&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.88)</td>
<td>2.98&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal feelings</td>
<td>3.33 (0.97)</td>
<td>3.62 (0.74)</td>
<td>3.35 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSH</td>
<td>2.18 (1.34)</td>
<td>1.93 (1.25)</td>
<td>2.16 (1.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. WCS sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td>3.86&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.76)</td>
<td>4.06&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (0.71)</td>
<td>3.31&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.77)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexy-power feelings</td>
<td>3.61&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt; (0.75)</td>
<td>3.26&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (0.84)</td>
<td>2.74&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal feelings</td>
<td>3.37&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.81)</td>
<td>3.87&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (0.61)</td>
<td>3.15&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCS</td>
<td>3.05 (1.58)</td>
<td>2.83 (1.52)</td>
<td>2.74 (1.48)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: LSH, Likelihood to Sexually Harass; WCS, Workplace Crush Scenario. For each row, means were tested with Tukey HSD post hoc test. Different subscripts in a row denote significantly different means. p < 0.05
the self- and other-focused priming combined, compared to the control prime, significantly increased these feelings. Contrast 2 was also significantly related to sexy-powerful feelings ($a = 0.29, p = 0.034$), indicating that self-focused power priming increased these feelings more than did other-focused power priming. Sexy-powerful feelings was significantly positively related to LSH ratings ($b = 0.69, p = 0.001$). Furthermore, the relative indirect effect of the priming contrasts on LSH through sexy-powerful feelings was greater than 0, with the 95% confidence intervals not including 0 (bootstrap indirect coefficient for Contrast 1, $ab = 0.23, 95\% CI: 0.06–0.41$; bootstrap coefficient for Contrast 2, $ab = 0.20, 95\% CI: 0.03–0.38$).

The second analysis predicted WCS from the contrast variables. Figure 3 depicts the paths in the model. Contrast 1 significantly predicted sexy-powerful feelings ($a = 0.70, p < 0.000$), as did Contrast 2 ($a = 0.35, p = 0.006$), indicating that self- and other-focused power priming increases sexy-powerful feelings, compared to the control, with self-focused power priming having a stronger influence than other-focused power priming. Sexy-powerful feelings positively predicted WCS ratings ($b = 0.75, p < 0.000$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of the priming contrasts on WCS ratings through sexy-powerful feelings was greater than 0 with the 95% confidence intervals not including 0 (Contrast 1: bootstrap coefficient = 0.51, 95% CI: 0.33–0.72; Contrast 2: bootstrap coefficient = 0.26, 95% CI: 0.08–0.45). These findings support H1 that self-focused power priming would increase both measures of SBH mediated by feelings of powerfulness and sexiness (Figures 2–5).

To examine H2 that trait dominance, agentic goal orientation and Dark Triad traits would moderate the indirect effect of self-focused power priming (compared to other conditions) on SBH measures through sexy-powerful feelings, we ran moderated mediation analyses using Process Model 7. This model examines moderation of the $a$ path (effects of priming conditions on sexy-powerful feelings). Analysis on each SBH measure was conducted separately for each proposed moderator.

**Notes:** $a =$ unstandardized regression coefficient of mediator regressed on IV contrasts; $b =$ unstandardized regression of DV regressed on mediator, $ab =$ relative indirect effect of IV contrast on DV through mediator
**Dominance as moderator.** Dominance did not moderate the associations between power priming conditions and sexy-powerful feelings in either sample (LSH sample: dominance × Contrast 1, $a = 0.08$, SE = 0.17, $t(276) = 0.46$, $p = 0.643$; dominance × Contrast 2, $a = 0.32$, SE = 0.18, $t(276) = 1.81$, $p = 0.071$. WCS sample: dominance × Contrast 1, $a = -0.03$, SE = 0.13, $t(271) = -0.33$, $p = 0.743$; dominance × Contrast 2, $a = -0.05$, SE = 0.15 $t(271) = -0.33$, $p = 0.743$).

**Dark Triad as moderator.** Dark Triad moderated the effect of Contrast 1 (combined power primes vs control) on sexy-powerful feelings in both samples; and it moderated the effect of Contrast 2 (self-focused power prime vs other-focused power prime) in the WCS sample but not the LSH sample (LSH sample: Dark Triad × Contrast 1, $a = -0.52$, SD = 0.15, $t(276) = -3.43$, $p < 0.000$; Dark Triad × Contrast 2, $a = -0.28$, SE = 0.17, $t(276) = -1.70$, $p = 0.09$. WCS sample: Dark Triad × Contrast 1, $a = -0.71$, SE = 0.14, $T(271) = -4.90$, $p < 0.000$; Contrast 2, $a = -0.34$, SE = 0.17, $T(271) = -2.01$, $p = 0.046$). In both samples, the contrasts between the power prime become weaker as Dark Triad traits become stronger. At 1 standard deviation below the mean of Dark Triad, the effect of power priming vs control (Contrast 1) on sexy-powerful feelings is positive and significant in both samples (LSH: $a = 0.78$, SE = 0.15, $t(276) = 5.31$, $p < 0.000$; WCS: $a = 1.06$, SE = 0.12, $t(271) = 7.862$, $p < 0.000$). But at 1 standard deviation above the mean, this effect becomes insignificant (LSH: $a = 0.09$, SE = 0.14, $t(276) = 0.62$, $p = 0.535$; WCS: $a = 0.19$, SE = 0.13, $t(271) = 1.51$, $p = 0.133$). In the WCS sample the effect of Contrast 2 (other-focused power vs self-focused power) is significant and positive (self-focused power increased sexy-powerful feelings more than other-focused power) when Dark Triad is low ($-1$ SD) ($a = 0.49$, SE = 0.15, $T(271) = 3.14$, $p = 0.002$), but not when Dark Triad is high ($+1$ SD) ($a = 0.06$, SE = 0.14, $T(271) = 0.44$, $p = 0.661$). Figure 6 depicts the difference in sexy-powerful feelings by priming condition and levels of Dark Triad traits, which shows that generally, at low level of Dark Triad traits, power priming, particularly self-focused priming, increases sexy-powerful feelings. At high levels of Dark Triad traits, the mean levels of sexy-powerful feelings are fairly high across all power priming conditions.

In addition, the indirect effects of power priming on both LSH and WCS were moderated by Dark Triad traits. As shown in Table III, the indirect effects were stronger and positive at low levels of Dark Triad traits, and weaker at high levels of Dark Triad traits.

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**Figure 4.** Simple mediation of power priming conditions on LSH through communal feelings

**Figure 5.** Simple mediation of power priming conditions on WCS through communal feelings
Agentic goal orientation as moderator. The degree to which participants endorsed agentic goals did not moderate the effect of power primes on sexy-powerful feelings in either sample (LSH: agentic goal orientation × Contrast 1, $a = -0.11$, SE = 0.10, $t(276) = -1.12$, $p = 0.265$; agentic goal orientation × Contrast 2, $a = -0.08$, SE = 0.11, $t(276) = -0.75$, $p = 0.454$. WCS: agentic goal orientation × Contrast 1, $a = -0.12$, SE = 0.09, $t(271) = -1.36$, $p = 0.17$; agentic goal orientation × Contrast 2, $a = 0.13$, SE = 0.11, $t(271) = -1.21$, $p = 0.226$.

Thus, we found mixed and counter-intuitive support for H2 that power-oriented personality traits would moderate the mediated effects of self-focused power (vs other primes) on SBH measured through sexy-powerful feelings. Neither trait dominance nor agentic goal orientation moderated the mediated paths for either measure of SBH (LSH or WCS). Dark Triad traits, however, did moderate these mediated relationships but in a negative fashion, such that at a low level of Dark Triad traits, compared to higher levels of these composite traits, catalyzed the
effect of self-focused power on sexy-powerful feelings and the indirect effect on SBH intentions. We next examined whether other-focused power priming would decrease SBH intentions through communal feelings and moderated by communal goal orientation.

**Self-focused vs other-focused and control on SBH through communal feelings**

H3 and H4 predicted that other-focused power priming would increase communal feelings, which, in turn, would decrease SBH ratings (H3), especially for participants who highly endorsed a communal goal orientation (H4). We first tested the simple mediation model (without communal goal orientation as a moderator). The first model in this set of analyses predicted LSH from the contrast variables representing the power priming conditions through communal feelings. Figure 4 depicts the paths in this model. Contrast 1 did not significantly affect communal feelings ($a = 0.13, p < 0.254$). Contrast 2, however, significantly affected communal feelings ($-0.29, p = 0.019$), indicating that other-focused power priming increased these feelings more than did self-focused power priming. Communal feelings were significantly positively related to LSH ratings ($b = 0.66, p = 0.001$). Furthermore, the relative indirect effect of Contrast 2 on LSH through communal feelings was greater than 0, with the 95% confidence intervals not including 0 (bootstrap coefficient for Contrast 2 = $-0.19, 95\% CI: -0.06$ to $-0.22$).

The next analysis examined the simple mediation of the priming conditions on WCS ratings through communal feelings. Figure 5 depicts the paths in this model. Contrast 1 significantly affected communal feelings ($a = 0.47, p < 0.000$). Contrast 2 also significantly affected communal feelings ($a = -0.50, p < 0.000$). Hence, other-focused power priming had the strongest effect on increasing communal feelings. As with the LSH sample, however, communal feelings positively predicted WCS ratings ($b = 0.60, p < 0.000$). The indirect effect of both contrasts did not include 0 (Contrast 1, bootstrap coefficient $= 0.28, 95\% CI: 0.14$ to $0.46$; Contrast 2: bootstrap coefficient = $-0.30, 95\% CI: -0.49$ to $-0.15$). Thus, power priming, particularly other-focused power priming, significantly increased WCS ratings through communal feelings. These findings do not support H3 that other-focused power priming, compared to other conditions, would decrease the likelihood to engage in SBH tendencies, even though other-focused priming did increase communal feelings.
To test $H4$ that communal goal orientation would moderate the mediated effects of other-focused power priming on likelihood to engage in SBH, we ran Process Model 7 in SPSS, which tests whether communal goal orientation moderates the $a$ path as well as the indirect relationships between the priming conditions and SBH measures.

In the LSH sample, communal goal orientation moderated the effect of Contrast 2 (other-focused power priming, compared to self-focused power priming) on communal feelings but not Contrast 1 (communal goal orientation $\times$ Contrast 1 $= -0.02$, SE $= 0.09$, $t(276) = -0.16$, $p = 0.87$; communal goal orientation $\times$ Contrast 2 $= 0.28$, SE $= 0.10$, $t(276) = 2.70$, $p = 0.007$). At 1 standard deviation below the mean of communal goal orientation, other-focused power (self-focused power) significantly increased communal feelings ($a = -0.65$, SE $= 0.15$, $t(276) = -4.45$, $p < 0.000$). At 1 standard deviation above the mean of communal goal orientation, this effect was insignificant ($a = -0.08$, SE $= 0.14$, $t(276) = -0.57$, $p = 0.57$). Figure 7 depicts the means of communal feelings by low, medium and high levels of communal goal orientation. Those who were high in communal goal orientation tended to have high communal feelings regardless of the priming condition. However, for those low in communal goal orientation, the other-focused power priming produced higher levels of communal feelings compared to those in the other priming conditions.

The indirect effect of other-focused power (self-focused power) on LSH through communal feelings was moderated by communal goal orientation. As shown in Table III, this indirect effect was strong and the 95% confidence interval did not cross 0 at $-1$ SD below the mean of communal goal orientation, whereas it was weak and the confidence interval did cross 0 at $+1$ SD above the mean of this moderator.

In the WCS sample, both power priming conditions positively and significantly increased communal feelings (Contrast 1: $a = 1.01$, SE $= 0.45$, $t(271) = 2.24$, $p = 0.026$), but there was no significant difference between other-focused and self-focused power priming on communal feelings (Contrast 2: $a = -0.35$, SE $= 0.53$, $t(271) = -0.65$, $p = 0.515$).

Communal goal orientation did not moderate the effect of either Contrast 1 or Contrast 2 on communal feelings (communal goal orientation $\times$ Contrast 1 $= -0.11$, SE $= 0.09$, $t(261) = -1.25$, $p = 0.211$; Contrast 2: communal goal orientation $\times$ Contrast 2 $= -0.03$, SE $= 0.10$, $t(261) = -0.28$, $p = 0.784$).

$H4$ therefore was partially supported in that communal goal orientation moderated the effects of power priming on LSH (but not WCS) through communal feelings. Contrary
to predictions, however, the indirect effect of communal feelings on LSH ratings was stronger for those who were low in communal goal orientation than for those who were high in this goal orientation.

Discussion
This study confirmed that priming people to feel powerful in a self-focused manner increased their proclivity to sexually harass, primarily through feeling sexy. As President Trump himself boasted earlier in his career, “when you're a star [...] you can do anything.” The effect of self-focused power was found with two different measures of SBH tendencies. Individual differences moderated these associations in different ways, which we elaborate on below.

The surprising finding of our study, however, was that priming people to feel powerful in a way that emphasized responsibility for the care of others (other-focused power) also increased the proclivity to sexually harass through effects on communal feelings. In other words, when participants were primed to feel that they were helpful to others, it appeared to give them license to sexually harass. In the LSH sample, this effect was buffered by communal goal orientation, but because it was not replicated in the WCS sample, we do not discuss it further. We discuss moral licensing (Miller and Effron, 2010) as a possible mechanism for the positive effect other-focused power priming on SBH tendencies through communal feelings. However, because we did not expect this finding, we did not test for moral licensing effects in this study.

Moral licensing refers to the increased likelihood of engaging in morally questionable behavior after establishing oneself as acting morally in the past (Miller and Effron, 2010). In other words, past good behaviors create a moral self-image, which, in turn, provides a license for an individual to “break bad” (Lin et al., 2016; Merritt et al., 2010). Sachdeva et al. (2009) found that priming to consider oneself as generous and kind toward others, compared to priming to consider one’s negative traits or neutral priming, decreased charitable and pro-environmental decisions. We speculate that a similar process was occurring in our study. Moral credits (psychically balancing questionable behavior with prior moral behavior or moral self-beliefs), moral credentials (construing questionable behavior as morally acceptable) and ego depletion (moral/ethical behavior depleting cognitive resources that are needed for ethical decision making) are underlying explanations for moral licensing (Lin et al., 2016; Miller and Effron, 2010). Ego depletion does not appear to be a likely explanation since participants did not spend cognitive energy on ethical behavior before completing measures of SBH. Instead, moral credits or moral credentialing are more likely explanations that could be explored in future research. If responsibility-based other-focused power is found to increase tendencies to engage in sexual-misconduct, such as SBH through moral licensing mechanisms, this may explain why trusted powerful individuals, such as priests and doctors, may engage in ethically unconscionable behavior, or why religious cleansing rituals actually increase immoral conduct (Lobel et al., 2015). Examining the role of moral licensing in motivating otherwise responsible and ethical people to sexually harass should be a priority for further research on the role of power on sex harassment.

Contrary to the approach/inhibition theory of power (Galinsky et al., 2003; Gruenfeld et al., 2008), power priming either did not enhance the influence of personal traits and goals on state feelings or SBH tendencies or they buffered those feelings and tendencies. Neither trait dominance nor agentic goal orientation affected the extent to which either self-focused or other-focused power priming increased sexy-powerful feelings. Dark Triad traits, however, decreased the impact of self-focused power priming on sexy-powerful feelings and the indirect effect on both LSH and WCS ratings. Consistent with prior research (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016), Dark Triad traits were strongly and directly associated with SBH tendencies (see Table I). As shown in Figures 2–5, it appears that individuals who are relatively high in
Dark Triad traits have high sexy-powerful feelings regardless of how they were primed. Power priming appeared to have the strongest effect at low levels of Dark Triad traits. These traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy—entail chronic interest in acquiring and using self-focused power. Therefore, priming such individuals to feel powerful in the moment may not have had a noticeable effect. However, as Williams et al. (2017) demonstrated, priming individuals with self-focused power who do not normally yearn for power may have temporarily boosted their feelings of sexiness and powerfulness, which, in turn, increased their inclination to sexually harass. In general, the effect of power and sexy feelings on SBH is consistent with an extensive line of research that has found associations between power, sexual stimulation and engaging in wrongful behavior such as SBH and sexual coercion (Bargh et al., 1995; Williams et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2018).

Our findings replicate previous research on the effects of power–sex linkages on SBH tendencies (Bargh et al., 1995), and build on emerging evidence that acute feelings of power appear to mobilize otherwise non-power-seeking individuals (i.e. those low in Dark Triad traits) to be less inhibited and more inclined toward engaging in SBH (Williams et al., 2017). We also report a novel finding that responsibility-centered, other-focused power, which is considered to be positive and effective for leadership (Eagly et al., 2003; van Dierendonck, 2011) and for confronting inappropriate behavior (Hershcovis et al., 2017), increases the potential to sexually harass. This may shed light on why some seemingly ethical men and women may become SBH perpetrators. There were subtle differences across the two measures of SBH, particularly with the moderator variables, but these differences were mostly a matter of degree, not substance. Because the LSH and WCS measured sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention forms of SBH, respectively (Fitzgerald et al., 1997), the relative consistency of our findings speaks to the generality of the effects of power on disinhibiting intentions to sexually harass. However, both forms entail motivation to gain sexual access to the target, what Stockdale (2005) labeled “approach”-motivated harassment. By contrast, gender harassment is typically triggered by a social status threat (Berdahl, 2007), which Stockdale labeled “rejection”-motivated harassment. Future research should examine whether and how powerful feelings drive gender harassment intentions.

Limitations

Our study used an online, self-report protocol to test our hypotheses, but much more work is needed with different research strategies before we can be confident of our findings. Although MTurk samples have typically been regarded as viable (Behrend et al., 2011; Paolacci et al., 2010), yielding results typical of average adults and business students, matters of attentiveness and careful responding remain a concern (Fleischer et al., 2015). We examined each response for intelligible responses to open ended questions, and seemingly non-random or overly systematic response (e.g. “all 5s”). The high reliability of our measures also assures us that responses were reasonable.

Single-source, self-report data are also a concern because participants may be attempting to show consistent responding across the survey. Construct validity may be strengthened with behavioral measures of SBH (e.g. Galdi et al., 2014), multi-source data and non-crowd-sourced populations.

Practical implications and future directions

The prevailing theories of the antecedents of SBH focus on organizational climate (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) or the interactive effects of perpetrator and situational characteristics (Pryor et al., 1993). Our study demonstrates that proximal boosts in both self-focused and other-focused power have strong effects on intentions to engage in SBH for both men and women. Therefore, interventions focused on changing the climate and training employees to
avoid harassing others need to include the recognition that both construals of power may be problematic. Sexual harassment training programs, in particular, need to be carefully constructed to avoid priming people who have pre-existing propensities to harass (Bingham and Scherer, 2001; Buckner et al., 2014) or organizations with cultures that are toxic and already primed for harassment (Glick et al., 2018). Our study suggests that care also be given in addressing individuals who may have new-found power but otherwise do not possess characteristics associated with power because such feelings of powerfullness may increase their latent tendencies to harass.

Organizational interventions need to directly address power imbalances. An example from a comprehensive study of academic SBH recommended that mentoring dyads where professors have total power over their advisees be dismantled (Johnson et al., 2018). Mentoring teams may be one way to curtail such power-imbalanced contexts.

The inimical effects of seemingly well-intentioned other-focused power should be addressed in training and organizational interventions. The Society for Human Resource Management suggests reframing sexual harassment training in terms of civility (Gurchiek, 2018). Rather than presenting “what not to do,” civility training teaches employees to engage in civil workplace behavior that is free from SBH. Bystander intervention or confrontation training is another training approach that could also be incorporated to suggest positive actions for any employee to take against SBH. This type of training may be particularly efficacious because it aligns with the approach orientation of powerful individuals: these individuals may be trained to approach goals of confrontation against rather than perpetuating of SBH. Other-focused power construal may affect willingness to proactively intervene during a harassment incident (Hershcovis et al., 2017), to express allyship toward those who are vulnerable to harassment, or to promote a workplace climate that does not tolerate harassment – all of which are positive ways of channeling one’s feelings of power. However, these prosocial behaviors should be monitored for signs of licensing to harass. Training interventions should be tested to explore how power can be channeled toward prosocial rather than offensive deeds. Especially considering the awareness already raised by the #MeToo movement, it is prudent for researchers to examine what can be done in the present to mitigate current and prevent future SBH concerns in the workplace.

Note
1. We did not focus on participant gender effects. However, gender (male/female) was tested as a main and moderator variable in all the analyses. There were main effects of gender on both measures of SBH (men higher), as well as on the mediator and moderator variables (men higher on sexy-powerful feelings, Dark Triad Traits and agentic goal orientation). Gender did not moderate any of the mediated paths. These results are available from the first author.

References


Sexual harassment intentions


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Out-of-body experience
Sex-based harassment linked to general dissociation, sexual dissociation, and sexual communication

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Abstract
Purpose – Although prior research has indicated that posttraumatic stress symptoms may result from sex-based harassment, limited research has targeted a key posttraumatic outcome – dissociation. Dissociation has been linked to experiences of betrayal trauma and institutional betrayal; sex-based harassment is very often a significant betrayal creating a bind for the target. The purpose of this paper is to extend existing research by investigating the relationship between sex-based harassment, general dissociation, sexual dissociation and sexual communication.

Design/methodology/approach – This exploratory study utilized self-report measures from a sample of male and female Oregon residents using Amazon Mechanical Turk (N = 582).

Findings – Results of regression analyses indicated that harassment statistically predicted higher general dissociation, higher sexual dissociation and less effective sexual communication, even after controlling for prior sexual trauma experiences. Results did not indicate any significant interactions between gender and harassment.

Practical implications – When considering the effects of sex-based harassment on women and men, clinicians and institutional organizations should consider the role of dissociation as a possible coping mechanism for harassment.

Originality/value – These correlational findings provide evidence that sex-based harassment is uniquely associated with multiple negative psychological outcomes in men and women.

Keywords Harassment, Dissociation, Sexual communication, Sexual trauma

Paper type Research paper

“It was like an out-of-body experience […] […] I pretended it hadn’t really happened […] I kept moving because it was part of my job, and I knew he was, at the time, a very important guy, and certainly important to me. I trusted him.” Jessica Teich, describing Richard Dreyfus (Yuan, 2017)

In 2006, Tarana Burke, a civil rights activist from the Bronx, began using the phrase “Me Too” to raise awareness for sexual violence. The use of the #MeToo hashtag exploded online on October 15, 2017, when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted: “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” By the next day, 4.7m people used the hashtag in 12m posts on Facebook, sharing personal accounts of sexual violence (Khomami, 2018). Sexual violence and sex-based harassment, topics that are often stigmatized and hushed, were suddenly thrust into popular discourse.

Sex-based harassment
Although the recent #MeToo movement raised public awareness of sexual violence, scholars have conducted research on sex-based harassment for decades. The term “sex-based harassment” is more comprehensive than the term “sexual assault,” which tends to focus solely on criminal sexual behavior (Cook et al., 2018). Sexual violence researchers generally consider sex-based harassment to include three types of discriminatory conduct: sexual coercion,
unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment (Cook et al., 2018). Sexual coercion, also termed “quid pro quo” harassment, involves a person in power demanding sexual favors through threats of professional punishment/retaliation or in exchange for a professional advantage. Unwanted sexual attention consists of unwanted and pervasive romantic or sexual advances. Gender harassment, the most common type of sex-based harassment (Leskinen et al., 2011), involves pejorative remarks or behaviors that belittle another person based on gender (Cook et al., 2018).

These three types have been conceptualized in an “iceberg” model of sex-based harassment, in which the majority of harassment goes unnoticed and unaddressed (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). At the tip of the iceberg sits the most apparent forms of sex-based harassment, including sexual coercion and forms of unwanted sexual attention. Submerged under the water, away from public consciousness, lie less noticeable forms of unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment, including gender slurs, sexist comments and obscene gestures.

Prevalence and outcomes of sex-based harassment
While many consider sex-based harassment to be an infrequent, mild form of sexual violence, research suggests otherwise. Fitzgerald (1993) estimated that approximately 50 percent of women experience sex-based harassment in the workplace. A second study found that 63 percent of female university employees and 68 percent of female private-sector employees experience harassment (Schneider et al., 1997). Other studies have found higher rates of sex-based harassment for women in male-dominated environments (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Street et al., 2007). Ilies et al. (2003) found that 24 percent of women considered themselves victims of sex-based harassment, and 58 percent of women responded affirmatively to at least one behaviorally-specific harassment situation. Estimates that consistently indicate harassment is pervasive have led Fitzgerald (2017) to label sexual harassment as “still the last great open secret” (p. 483). Although men do experience sex-based harassment (Waldo et al., 1998), rates for men tend to be lower than for women (Rosenthal et al., 2016).

Sex-based harassment in the workplace predicts multiple negative outcomes among women, including psychological distress, physical health outcomes, job absenteeism and job turnover (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Schneider et al., 1997). Similar outcomes have been found for men (Holland et al., 2016). The effects of sex-based harassment may be more intense for repeated, “unseen” incidences of gender harassment than for less frequent, albeit more visible, incidences of sexual coercion (Sojo et al., 2016; Langhout et al., 2005). Vicarious observation of harassment at work has also been linked to workplace withdrawal and decreased well-being (Miner-Rubino and Cortina, 2007). Other studies have tied workplace harassment experiences to disordered eating (Harned, 2000), depressive and anxious symptoms (Reed et al., 2016) and alcohol abuse (Rospenda et al., 2008).

Research has also found that workplace sex-based harassment can have effects typical of trauma exposure. One study found that harassment predicts severity of posttraumatic stress symptoms, including re-experiencing, hyperarousal, sleep problems and avoidance (Palmieri and Fitzgerald, 2005). This relationship persists even after controlling for prior trauma (Stockdale et al., 2009; McDermut et al., 2000).

Studies of harassment in educational institutions have found similar results. Harassment has been linked to students’ perceptions of unfairness in the classroom (Cortina et al., 1998), low academic confidence (Cortina et al., 1998), low academic satisfaction (Huerta et al., 2006), disengagement from academics (Huerta et al., 2006) and avoidance of classes or professors (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Rosenthal et al. (2016) found that sex-based harassment in a graduate school sample was associated with posttraumatic stress symptoms, even after accounting for other victimization.
Unexplored associations of harassment

As it stands, further investigation is needed into outcomes associated with sex-based harassment. Although studies have looked at posttraumatic stress symptoms that result from harassment, few studies have targeted a key posttraumatic outcome – dissociation.

Dissociation is characterized by a disconnection or disintegration among one’s consciousness, memory and the external environment (DePrince and Freyd, 2007; Zurbriggen and Freyd, 2004). Dissociative symptoms can range from a mild instance of “highway hypnosis” to an “out-of-body” experience. In other cases, they may manifest as significant memory lapses or severe identity confusion. Dissociation is one of the most well-studied posttraumatic symptoms in the field of trauma; survivors of trauma report elevated levels of dissociation not only during the trauma itself (Lensvelt-Mulders et al., 2008), but also increased dissociative tendencies (Bremner and Brett, 1997; Chu and Dill, 1990) and difficulties with emotional awareness (Polusny et al., 2008) that extend beyond the trauma.

Although often lumped with other posttraumatic stress symptoms, dissociation is of particular interest to examine with regard to sex-based harassment. The relationship between dissociation and interpersonal trauma has a strong theoretical foundation in betrayal trauma theory (Freyd, 1994, 1996). Betrayal trauma theory posits that dissociation serves as an adaptive mechanism to cope and preserve necessary relationships on which the survivor might depend (Freyd, 1996; Freyd and Birrell, 2013). In line with this theory, research has demonstrated that survivors of abuse perpetrated by a close and trusted other report increased dissociation and memory impairments (DePrince and Freyd, 2007; Freyd et al., 2005; Goldsmith et al., 2012).

Experiences of betrayal by a trusted institution, termed institutional betrayal, have also been linked to increased dissociation, even when controlling for prior experiences of trauma (Smith and Freyd, 2017). Institutional betrayal occurs when a trusted institution fails to adequately address – or is actively complicit in – the mistreatment of one of its members (Smith and Freyd, 2014). A workplace may commit institutional betrayal by failing to investigate a worker’s report of sexual assault or actively covering up the assault. Like institutional betrayal, sex-based harassment may not involve any physical contact, but is often perpetrated by others in authority and power positions. Thus, dissociation may be important to assess when considering the outcomes of sex-based harassment. Similar to those experiencing interpersonal and institutional betrayal, those experiencing harassment may develop dissociative tendencies to maintain relationships that preserve their sense of security in society or the workplace. Only one study to our knowledge has explored the relationship between dissociation and any type of sexual harassment. This study found that dissociation was significantly associated with childhood sexual harassment in a sample of 287 psychiatric outpatients in Germany and Switzerland (Mueller-Pfeiffer et al., 2013).

In addition, no study to our knowledge has assessed the associations of sex-based harassment on sexual outcomes. Multiple studies have documented the relationship between sexual trauma and sexual satisfaction and sexual functioning (O’Driscoll and Flanagan, 2016; Stephenson et al., 2012). In this study, however, we focus on the association between harassment, sexual dissociation and sexual communication. Sexual dissociation is a specific manifestation of a general dissociative tendency; it can be defined as “someone engaging in sexual activity without attending to her or his own feelings of fear, pleasure, or safety” (Zurbriggen and Freyd, 2004, p. 149). Although few studies exist looking at the relationship between sexual dissociation and trauma, Hansen et al. (2012) found that child sexual abuse among a sample of 57 adults with HIV predicted increased rates of dissociation during sexual activity. Similarly, Rosenthal and Freyd (2017) found that childhood betrayal trauma predicted diminished sexual communication, when accounting for trait dissociation in general and dissociation during sex specifically. The authors conclude that these experiences of trauma appear “to initiate a trajectory wherein survivors’ trauma symptoms...
inhibit their capacity to communicate clearly with sexual partners” (Rosenthal and Freyd, 2017, p. 14). Sexual dissociation and sexual communication may be relevant to examine with regard to sex-based harassment because harassment – even harassment that is not overtly sexual – can reflect sexist stereotypes that may have implications for sexual behavior. If someone is experiencing harassment, and this mistreatment is not addressed, these feelings may be internalized, specifically during sex. Victims may be less able to attend to their sexual needs or consider their needs important, and then, in turn, be less able express their needs to their partner (Zurbriggen and Freyd, 2004).

The current study
In the present study, we examined sex-based harassment and its association with general dissociation, sexual dissociation and sexual communication. The aims of the study included:

1. to explore the relationship of sex-based harassment with general dissociative tendencies, sexual dissociation and sexual communication;
2. to assess if any significant relationships between sex-based harassment and the three outcomes remain, even after controlling for other prior sexual trauma experiences; and
3. to assess gender differences in the relationship between sex-based harassment and general dissociative tendencies, sexual dissociation and sexual communication.

Method
Participants
Data were collected from Oregon residents ages 18–35 through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk; N = 668) as part of a larger study. MTurk is a resource offered through Amazon.com where users complete tasks or surveys online for monetary compensation. MTurk is a commonly used sampling method for social science research and has been found to be more demographically diverse than university convenience samples (Buhrmester et al., 2011). In this study, participants who failed attention-check questions (n = 18), completed less than < 50 percent of the survey items (n = 38), or who did not live in Oregon (n = 4) were removed for purposes of analysis. Although participants could choose options other than male or female for their gender, those who identified as other/transgender (n = 26) could not be included in the analyses because of low power. The sample used for analysis (n = 582) was 56.5 percent female and 43.5 percent male. The mean age of participants was 27.4 (SD = 4.7). The majority of the sample was heterosexual (82.1 percent) and White (90.0 percent). Additional demographic characteristics are presented in Table I.

Measures
The measures used in this study were collected from a multi-component study targeting young adult residents of Oregon. The original study included both self-report measures and an experimental manipulation examining the effects of viewing college sports videos (Adams-Clark et al., in preparation). This current report analyzes self-report measures of trauma exposure, sex-based harassment victimization, general dissociative tendencies, sexual dissociative tendencies and sexual communication, all of which preceded the experimental manipulation.

Prior sexual trauma. Prior sexual trauma history was measured using four items from the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS; Goldberg and Freyd, 2006). Prior research has indicated that the BBTS is a valid measure of trauma (DePrince, 2001) and demonstrates adequate reliability (Goldberg and Freyd, 2006). The four items included were: “You were made to have some form of sexual contact, such as touching or penetration, by someone
with whom you were very close (such as a parent or lover) before the age of 18”; “You were made to have some form of sexual contact by someone with whom you were very close after the age of 18”; “You were made to have such sexual contact by someone with whom you were not close before the age of 18”; and “You were made to have such sexual contact by someone with whom you were not close before the age of 18.” Participants indicated if the respective situation had occurred “Never,” “One or two times,” or “More than that.” Consistent with prior research (Freyd et al., 2005), each item was scored dichotomously; responses were coded as “0” if the event never happened and “1” if the event occurred at least once. These scores were then summed to create a continuous Prior Sexual Trauma score ranging from 0 to 4.

**Sex-based harassment.** Sex-based harassment was measured using a modified version of the shortened Sexual Experiences Questionnaire-DoD (SEQ-DoD-s; Stark et al., 2002). The SEQ-DoD-s originally consists of 16 items. Consistent with Rosenthal et al. (2016), three items were added to the scale to measure electronic harassment (e.g. someone “spread unwelcome sexual rumors about you by text, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means”). Each item asks participants to rate how frequently they have encountered a certain sex-based harassment situation in any context in their lifetime. Participants rated each item on a Likert-type scale that ranges from 0 to 4, where 0 corresponds to “Never,” 1 corresponds to “Once or Twice,” 2 corresponds to “Sometimes,” 3 corresponds to “Often” and 4 corresponds to “Many Times.” The first item of the questionnaire (“you have been treated differently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I. Demographic information of sample (N = 582), excluding gender-nonconforming participants (n = 26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is your gender?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is your primary sexual orientation?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian/Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is your race/ethnicity?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Alaskan Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a, Chicano/a, Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the highest level of education that you have completed?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other advanced degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Percentages do not add up to 100 because more than one option could be selected.
because of your sex”) was eliminated in line with recent research (Rosenthal et al., 2016). The 18 item ratings were summed and averaged to create an average sex-based harassment scale score, where higher scores represented more frequent sex-based harassment victimization. In this study, this scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = 0.95 \)). The distribution of scores for women (Skew = 0.90, SE = 0.14; Kurtosis = 0.63, SE = 0.27) and men (Skew = 1.18, SE = 0.16; Kurtosis = 0.73, SE = 0.31) were in the acceptable ranges (George and Mallery, 2010).

**General dissociative tendencies.** General dissociative tendencies were measured using the 40-item Wessex Dissociation Scale (WDS) (Kennedy et al., 2004). Each item was rated on a Likert-type scale that ranges from 0 to 5, where 0 corresponds to “Never,” 1 corresponds to “Rarely,” 2 corresponds to “Sometimes,” 3 corresponds to “Often,” 4 corresponds to “Very Often” and 5 corresponds to “All the Time.” An example item from this scale is “I notice myself doing things that do not make sense.” The 40-item ratings were summed and averaged to create an average WDS total score, where higher scores represent higher general dissociative tendencies. In this study, this scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = 0.96 \)). The distribution of scores for women (Skew = 1.03, SE = 0.14; Kurtosis = 0.87, SE = 0.28) and men (Skew = 0.93, SE = 0.16; Kurtosis = 0.65, SE = 0.32) were in the acceptable ranges.

**Sexual dissociative tendencies.** Sexual dissociation was measured using the six-item Sexual Dissociation Scale (SDS) (Rosenthal and Freyd, 2017). Each item was rated on a Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to “Strongly Disagree,” 2 corresponds to “Disagree,” 3 corresponds to “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 corresponds to “Agree” and 5 corresponds to “Strongly Agree.” An example item from this scale is “During sexual activity, I have felt as though I was watching myself from outside my body.” The six-item ratings were summed and averaged to create an average SDS score, where higher scores represent higher sexual dissociative tendencies. In this study, this scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability (\( \alpha = 0.86 \)). The distribution of scores for women (Skew = 0.59, SE = 0.14; Kurtosis = −0.61, SE = 0.27) and men (Skew = 0.60, SE = 0.16; Kurtosis = −0.49, SE = 0.31) were in the acceptable ranges.

**Sexual communication.** Sexual communication was measured using the five-item Sexual Communication Scale (SCS) (Rosenthal and Freyd, 2017). Each item was rated on a Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to “Strongly Disagree,” 2 corresponds to “Disagree,” 3 corresponds to “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 corresponds to “Agree” and 5 corresponds to “Strongly Agree.” An example item from this scale is “If something doesn’t feel good during sexual activity, I say so.” The five-item ratings were summed and averaged to create an average SCS score, where higher scores represent more effective sexual communication. In this study, this scale demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = 0.78 \)). The distribution of scores for women (Skew = −0.27, SE = 0.14; Kurtosis = −0.68, SE = 0.27) and men (Skew = −0.06, SE = 0.15; Kurtosis = −0.61, SE = 0.31) were in the acceptable ranges.

**Demographics questionnaire.** Participants were asked to report their age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest education completed and sexual orientation.

**Procedure**
An online version of this study was created through Qualtrics survey software, and the survey link was distributed to participants through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were informed of study procedures and content through an informed consent process. Participants were required to accurately respond to at least four out of the five attention-check items that were placed throughout the survey to ensure response quality (e.g. Rosenthal et al., 2016; Rosenthal and Freyd, 2017). After completing the study, participants received $2 in
compensation and were presented with debriefing materials, including contact information for sexual violence resources. All study procedures were approved by the institution’s Office of Research Compliance (Institutional Review Board).

Results

Data preparation

Data were analyzed using R Version 3.5.2 (R Core Team, 2018) and R packages stats (Version 3.5.2; R Core Team, 2018) and tidyverse (Version 1.2.1; Wickham, 2017). A dummy-coded dichotomous variable was created to represent participant gender (0 = male and 1 = female). The data were assessed for “extreme” outliers, defined as $3.0 \times$ interquartile range above the third quartile or below the first quartile. There was one data point among women’s dissociation scores that met this criterion, and it was removed before conducting analyses. Missing data were deleted pairwise for correlation and regression analyses. All continuous variables were centered for regression analyses.

Preliminary analyses

On the BBTS, 50.5 percent of women and 25.3 percent of men reported at least one incident of unwanted sexual contact. Eight women and 29 men endorsed none of the sex-based harassment items on the SEQ (rated all 18 items as 0). Women reported experiencing an average of 11.74 (SD = 4.93) of the 18 sex-based harassment situations at least once (median = 12; mode = 17). Men endorsed an average of 7.24 (SD = 5.55) of the 18 sex-based harassment situations at least once (median = 7, mode = 0). Percentages of women and men endorsing each harassment item at least once are listed in Table II. \( \chi^2 \) tests of independence were conducted on the frequencies of men and women reporting each item of sex-based harassment at least once. A Bonferroni correction was used to correct for the number of tests, adjusting the alpha level to 0.002. Results indicated that significantly more women experienced each type of harassment than men, with the exception of “spread unwelcome sexual rumors about you by text, e-mail, Facebook or other electronic means” and “called you gay or lesbian in a negative way by text, e-mail, Facebook or other electronic means” (see Table II).

Descriptive statistics for summed scale scores, stratified by gender, are presented in Table III. A series of \( t \)-tests were conducted, and male and female participants differed significantly in self-reported prior sexual trauma, sex-based harassment, sexual dissociation and sexual communication scores, but not in general dissociation scores.

Correlation analyses

Correlations were estimated using Pearson’s \( r \) correlation coefficients. Sex-based harassment scores were positively correlated with prior sexual trauma, general dissociation and sexual dissociation scores, and negatively correlated with sexual communication scores, for both women and men, \( p < 0.001 \) (see Table III).

Regression analyses

In order to assess the predictive power of sex-based harassment, controlling for sexual trauma history, a linear regression model for each outcome variable (general dissociation, sexual dissociation and sexual communication) was conducted. The first step of each model contained the prior sexual trauma and gender predictors. In the second step, the sex-based harassment predictor was added, representing its predictive power above and beyond prior sexual trauma. In the third step, gender \( \times \) prior sexual trauma and gender \( \times \) sex-based harassment interaction terms were added to assess for gender differences (see Table IV). The first step of the general dissociation model was significant,
The second step of the general dissociation model was also significant, $F(1, 519) = 138.99, p < 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.20$, such that higher harassment scores statistically predicted higher dissociation scores. The third step was also significant, $F(2, 517) = 9.12, p < 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.08$. In this third step, only the gender $\times$ prior sexual trauma interaction was significant, $b = -0.17, t(517) = -2.75, p < 0.01$. The simple slope for
Men demonstrated a trend toward statistical significance, $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 1.89$, $p = 0.06$, and the simple slope for women was marginally significant, $b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -2.02$, $p = 0.05$.

In the sexual dissociation model, the first step was significant, $F(2, 540) = 37.65$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.12$. The second step was also significant, $F(1, 539) = 39.54$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.06$, such that higher harassment scores statistically predicted higher sexual dissociation scores. The third step was not significant, $F(2, 537) = 0.03$, $p = 0.97$, $\Delta R^2 < 0.001$, indicating no significant differences between women and men.

### Table IV.
Regression coefficients predicting average general dissociation, sexual dissociation and sexual communication scores (centered) for participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>2, 520</td>
<td>16.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prior sex trauma</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>5.62****</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>1, 519</td>
<td>138.99***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-1.78****</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>1, 519</td>
<td>138.99***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>4.49****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prior sex trauma</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-5.49****</td>
<td></td>
<td>1, 519</td>
<td>138.99***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex harassment</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>11.79****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>5.50****</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>2, 517</td>
<td>9.12***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prior sex trauma</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.89****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-6.16****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex harassment</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>8.59****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender $\times$ prior sex trauma</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-2.75**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender $\times$ sex harassment</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-1.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $n = 581$. One outlier was also removed before analyses. $^*p < 0.05; ^**p < 0.01; ^***p < 0.001; ^****p < 0.001$.  

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In the sexual communication model, the first step was significant, $F(2, 542) = 23.93, p < 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.08$. The second step was also significant, $F(1, 541) = 14.08, p < 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.02$, such that higher harassment scores statistically predicted lower sexual communication scores.

The third step was not significant, $F(2, 539) = 0.58, p = 0.97, \Delta R^2 = 0.002$, indicating no significant differences between women and men.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the present study was to investigate sex-based harassment and its unique association with general dissociation, sexual dissociation and sexual communication among men and women. General dissociation, sexual dissociation and sexual communication have been found in prior research to be related to multiple types of trauma, including sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse (e.g. Hansen et al., 2012; Rosenthal and Freyd, 2017).

Results of this study supported several of our exploratory hypotheses. First, we replicated the finding that sex-based harassment experiences are common among women and men, but women reported significantly higher sex-based harassment scores than men. New to this study, we found that harassment experiences were positively related to general dissociation scores, positively related to sexual dissociation scores, and negatively related to sexual communication scores, even after controlling for experiences of unwanted sexual contact.

Although causal relationships cannot be established, these results indicate that distressing experiences of harassment may, even in the absence of other sexual trauma or unwanted physical contact, lead to increased dissociative tendencies. Women and men may be using dissociation as a coping mechanism for mistreatment. As predicted by betrayal trauma theory (Freyd, 1996) and institutional betrayal (Smith and Freyd, 2014), this coping mechanism may allow harassed individuals to maintain relationships. When further interpreted in the context of research suggesting that confronting a harasser often leads to negative outcomes for the victim (Hesson-Mcinnis and Fitzgerald, 1997; Stockdale, 1998) and reporting harassment may lead to worsened outcomes (Bergman et al., 2002), it is understandable that women and men may engage in dissociation. This coping mechanism, while useful in the short-term, may have long-term consequences. Dissociation may produce cognitive and executive functioning deficits that may prevent people from fully engaging with their lives and put them at risk for revictimization (Stockdale et al., 2014).

Results also indicated that sex-based harassment was related to increased sexual dissociation and decreased sexual communication. Sex-based harassment may be having a silencing effect on victims, not only in the public domain in which it occurs, but also in their personal lives. These high levels of sexual dissociation, and low levels of sexual communication, may subsequently decrease sexual and relationship satisfaction among those experiencing high levels of sexual harassment. Sexual dissociation and communication deficits may then put individuals at risk for revictimization or unsafe sex practices (Zurbriggen and Freyd, 2004).

Although sex-based harassment was our primary predictor of interest, we found an unexpected interaction between gender and prior sexual trauma on dissociation, such that men with higher levels of sexual trauma reported a marginal increase in dissociation, and women reported a marginal decrease in dissociation. This finding stands in contrast to prior research indicating that women are at a greater risk for exhibiting posttraumatic stress symptoms after trauma (Tolin and Foa, 2008). A more likely explanation for this finding could be a result of the low number of men and women obtaining the highest sexual trauma scores, as well as the potential multicollinearity between the prior sexual trauma, sexual harassment, and interaction predictors.
Although the results of the present study have societal implications, there are also limitations to the study that must be considered. First, we must be cautious when interpreting the relationships found in this study, as the data are cross-sectional in nature. Because of this, no causal claims can be garnered from this study alone. Consistent with prior research in the field of trauma, it is likely that sex-based harassment contributes to coping mechanisms that subsequent become challenging psychological consequences, such as the development of dissociative tendencies. However, it is theoretically possible that these psychological outcomes may precede any sex-based harassment, or that a third variable may account for this relationship.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of diversity in the sample. Due to the original study design, we sampled only young adult residents of the state of Oregon, the majority of whom were White and whose experiences of sex-based harassment may not be representative of the national population. This may be particularly problematic given that experiences of harassment may vary or intensify, depending on race/ethnicity (Buchanan and Fitzgerald, 2008) and sexuality (Rabelo and Cortina, 2014). In addition, although this study found significant gender differences in sex-based harassment between men and women, it is possible that our measure of sex-based harassment may not have adequately assess the forms of sex-based harassment that men are more likely to experience.

Results of this research have implications for organizational leaders, policymakers and clinicians. In order to create a healthy and equitable organizational climate, leaders should implement clear and enforceable policies preventing sex-based harassment. Clinicians working with women and men experiencing sex-based harassment should assess for dissociative symptoms – a hallmark of trauma – as well as sexual difficulties. It is vital that others understand that the harmful effects of even “mild” sex-based harassment can bleed into both the professional and personal lives of the harassed.

Future research should expand upon these findings by looking longitudinally at experiences of sex-based harassment and subsequent psychological outcomes in a more diverse sample, enabling researchers to establish causal relationships between sex-based harassment and psychological outcomes. Future research should also explore how the location/environment in which the harassment occurred, such as at work (Fitzgerald, 1993), on the street (Davidson et al., 2016; Mellgren et al., 2017), at home (Reed et al., 2005) or on the internet (Barak, 2005), influences psychological outcomes. In light of research findings indicating that the impact of harassment depends on the power of the perpetrator (Huerta et al., 2006), future research should also investigate how a person’s relationship with the harasser (stranger vs trusted other) may influence posttraumatic outcomes.

This study provides further evidence for the negative – and often traumatic – outcomes associated with sex-based harassment for both men and women. Results from this study suggest that sex-based harassment may be having a profound influence on victims, and even mild harassment should be acknowledged as a serious issue with potential psychological consequences. In line with theories of betrayal trauma and institutional betrayal, harassed individuals may be engaging in greater dissociation to cope with mistreatment. Despite its limitations, we hope this research will validate of the subjective experiences of those who have been harassed, inform only clinical work and inspire change at both institutional and societal levels.
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Ostracizing targets of workplace sexual harassment before and after the #MeToo movement

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the connections between sexual harassment and ostracism both before and after the modern day #MeToo movement. It outlines how the birth of the #MeToo movement lessened the impact of ostracism, empowering victims to report their abusers.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides an overview of the ostracism literature, and discusses why ostracism has historically prevented individuals from disclosing workplace abuse. It also examines recent and historical cases of sexual harassment where ostracism has both inhibited targets of sexual harassment from reporting and harmed those who stood up for their right not to be harassed.

Findings – Both purposeful and non-purposeful ostracism have negative impacts on employees and organizations as a whole, and the fear of ostracism prevented many from disclosing harassment and abuse in the workplace. The #MeToo movement, by nature, is antithetical to ostracism by building community and freeing people to seek justice. This paper makes practical recommendations for organizations that wish to help prevent ostracism as a response to workplace sexual harassment disclosure.

Research limitations/implications – Both purposeful and non-purposeful ostracism have negative impacts on employees and organizations as a whole, and the fear of ostracism prevent many from disclosing harassment and abuse in the workplace. The #MeToo movement by nature is antithetical to ostracism, building community and freeing people to seek justice. This paper makes practical recommendations for organizations that wish to prevent ostracism as a response to workplace sexual harassment disclosure. Additionally, it provides future research directions to explore the empirical link between the disclosure of sexual harassment and ostracism.

Originality/value – This paper analyzes a crucial barrier to reporting sexual harassment. It both examines the consequences of ostracism and highlights how the threat of ostracism can be overcome through intentional organizational efforts.

Keywords Ostracism, Workplace sexual harassment, #MeToo movement

Paper type General review

Workplace sexual harassment is an all too common phenomenon. Each year, over 12,000 US-based employees file sexual harassment claims with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, n.d.), and the costs to the individuals and organizations involved can be quite large in terms of reputational damage and financial settlements. The current #MeToo phenomenon, which prompted targets to disclose their experiences of assault or harassment online through social media, exposed perpetrators and their enablers, many of whom committed multiple abuses over extended periods of time. Some of these perpetrators are just now being revealed to the public, leading many to wonder, “Why now? Why not earlier? Why wait?”

Unfortunately, the suppression of the truth stemmed from a history of oppression; many had witnessed victims come forward only to be shunned and silenced. The tail end of 1991 brought about the very public shaming of Anita Hill, who experienced years of workplace
sexual harassment under her former boss and US Supreme Court Candidate Clarence Thomas. Summoned before the Senate Judiciary Committee to discuss her sexual harassment and perceptions of Thomas’ character, several senators maligned her during the nationally televised hearings. Her credibility was called into question, and she was accused of trying to sink his nomination out of revenge or for her own personal gain.

Hil returned as a Professor at the University of Oklahoma Law School to mixed reactions. While some community members were supportive of her efforts to bring the truth to light, others disapproved, sending threatening and racist letters calling for her resignation. In addition, those in her professional sphere began to distance themselves from her, impacting her career and personal life (Casteel, 1997; Hill, 1997). In the end, she resigned her tenured position and moved away from her home state while Thomas was appointed to the Supreme Court.

This very public instance of humiliation and retaliation against a victim of sexual harassment has since played out again and again. In fact, retaliation is a major concern for many victims of sexual harassment, who avoid reporting their abuse to avoid these behaviors (Cortina and Magley, 2003; Hu, 2017; Porter, 2018). However, much of the literature on the fear of retaliation against targets of sexual harassment only refer to tangible, employment-related outcomes like termination or being denied opportunities for training and advancement. To date, there is very little research on sexual harassment and retaliation that focuses on ostracism as an outcome. Still, as made apparent by the variety of narratives stemming from this movement, sexual harassment often leaves targets with feelings of shame and isolation. Those feelings of isolation led Tarana Burke, who first used the phrase “Me Too” on social media in 2006, to encourage people to empathize and stand beside targets of harassment and abuse. Then in late 2017, in response to the many allegations of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace of “Hollywood,” Alyssa Milano re-invigorated the modern #MeToo movement, tweeting: “Suggested by a friend: If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” In addition to showing the magnitude of the problem, targets of harassment had the chance to see that they are not alone. To witness that so many have been similarly targeted lessens some of the stigma associated with harassment, and encourages people to be supportive of those disclosing harassment in the workplace. Even if targets are unable to find social support at work, there is an entire online community willing to step in and provide support, either emotionally or by applying outside pressure on organizations to punish the harasser. The potential for isolation and ostracism is lessened by encouraging individuals to come together based upon their shared experiences.

Ostracism has been acknowledged as both an outcome of disclosing sexual harassment as well as a barrier preventing targets from disclosing their abuse. However, to our knowledge, there has been no prior research on the relationship between ostracism and workplace sexual harassment disclosure. In light of the #MeToo movement, this paper examines the impact of #MeToo on ostracism to explore the dynamics of isolation and solidarity after a disclosure of sexual harassment. The key function of the #MeToo movement is to end the isolation of victims. Understanding the ways in which ostracism functions allows us to better understand the success of the movement.

First, we provide an overview of the ostracism literature. Then, we discuss why ostracism and related phenomena have historically prevented individuals from disclosing workplace harassment and harmed those who stood up for their right not to be abused. We also examine how the birth of the #MeToo movement broke the stronghold of isolation, lessening the impact of ostracism to empower victims to report their abusers. We make recommendations for organizations to help mitigate or prevent ostracism as a response to reports of sexual harassment. Finally, this paper provides suggestions for future research to strengthen the empirical linkages between the disclosure of sexual harassment and ostracism.
Ostracism

Ostracism, defined specifically as being excluded and ignored by individuals or groups, causes targets to feel pain and psychological distress (Williams, 2001). Overlapping constructs include social exclusion, isolation and shunning (Robinson et al., 2013). Nearly two-thirds of employees reported being ostracized at work (Fox and Stallworth, 2005; O’Reilly et al., 2014). Workplace ostracism occurs when an individual or group (e.g. subordinates, peers or supervisors) omits taking actions that engage another member of the organization when it would be socially appropriate to do so. This includes behaviors like being shut out of conversations or having one’s greetings go unanswered at work (Ferris et al., 2008). Humans, as social creatures, are imbued with an innate need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). This need is critical to human well-being, resulting in a predisposed ability to detect ostracism (Spoor and Williams, 2007). As such, even those burdened by the weight of harassment and assault will seek to mitigate the damages ostracism would bring, even if it means delaying or failing to report their abuse (Porter, 2018).

Workplace ostracism that one might suffer as a result of harassment, or of disclosing harassment, is particularly pervasive because of its social acceptability. Bergman et al. (2002, p. 232) note that “reporting does not occur in a vacuum,” and that while disclosing allows the target to gain much-needed support from friends, coworkers or the organization itself, it also exposes the target to additional negative consequences. The fear of social retaliation (to include ostracism specifically) has hindered many from reporting their sexual harassment, especially in the pre-#MeToo workplace (Cortina and Magley, 2003; Hu, 2017; Porter, 2018). Because ostracism is not perceived as an overtly threatening action, ostracizing targeted coworkers can be marketed as a personal choice or even a simple accident. Unlike retaliation or physically threatening actions, ostracism is seen a low-level offense and is often not formally prohibited (O’Reilly et al., 2014).

There are two forms of ostracism relevant to workplace sexual harassment: intentional or purposeful ostracism and unintentional or non-purposeful ostracism (Williams, 2007; Robinson et al., 2013). When ostracism is non-purposeful it “occurs when actors are unaware that they are engaging in behaviors that serve to socially exclude another” (Robinson et al., 2013, p. 29). A key aspect of this form of ostracism is that there is no intention to ostracize. For example, a person may fail to call or e-mail a coworker who disclosed harassment with the same regularity as before, accidentally withdrawing social contact when their intent may have been to grant the victim some healing space. In the workplace, this may be particularly damaging because the targets of non-purposeful harassment might internalize the behaviors of the non-purposeful ostracizer over time and blame themselves for being ostracized (Smith and Williams, 2004).

Conversely, purposeful ostracism “occurs when an actor is aware of his or her inaction to socially engage another and does so intentionally” (Robinson et al., 2013, p. 26). In this sense, purposeful ostracism overlaps with retaliation in that it is performed in order to “get back” at an individual or make them “fall in line.” In the whistleblowing literature, those who report coworkers are perceived as a threat against group cohesion and are commonly ostracized as a form of punishment (Sumanth et al., 2011). In regard to sexual harassment, purposeful ostracism can be used as a threat to deter victims from speaking out against their harassers. The most common example of purposeful ostracism is the “silent treatment” (Williams and Sommer, 1997). In the workplace this may manifest through something as seemingly benign as purposefully leaving someone out of a group text, or as more extreme actions like blatantly ignoring someone’s presence. A large proportion of respondents to Fox and Stallworth’s (2005) study on workplace racial/ethnic discrimination reported ostracism experiences, including the “silent treatment” (66 percent), physical isolation from coworkers (17.7 percent) or having coworkers fail to return phone calls and e-mails (42.6 percent). In 2014, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) found that female mortgage
bankers at JPMorgan Chase who were subjected to sex-based harassment were at times purposefully ostracized for refusing to participate in a negative and harassing climate. These women suffered social and economic consequences, losing out on multiple training and sales opportunities (EEOC, 2014). Similarly, a study on government whistleblowers found that high-power ostracizers (like supervisors) had the most negative psychological and economic impacts on targeted employees (Faulkner, 1999). A more recent study found similar outcomes. Victims who were ostracized by a high-power authority and whose social support network was inadequate experienced the worst outcomes on organizational citizenship behaviors and interpersonal deviance (Fiset et al., 2017). These instances highlight how victims of sexual harassment may be threatened or punished with ostracism in conjunction with other retaliatory techniques to discourage them from disclosing their abuse.

How does ostracism differ from other forms of mistreatment?
The act of ostracism differs greatly from other negative workplace experiences in that it is defined by its inaction rather than its action (Ferris et al., 2008). Acts such as incivility, harassment and aggression require the actors to socially engage with the target. Ostracism is constructed as the “omission of positive attention from others rather than the commission of negative attention” (Robinson et al., 2013, p. 6). The distinction of decreased social interaction is important to understanding the consequences of ostracism, because (much like sexual harassment) those inactions threaten an individual’s four fundamental needs: belongingness, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence (Williams, 2009).

However, unlike other forms of workplace abuse not all ostracism is intended to cause harm. As a result, motive is not included in the definition of ostracism (Williams and Sommer, 1997). This is echoed in the construct of incivility, though the intent to harm or awareness of causing harm is critical to the constructs of harassment and aggression in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2017; Williams, 2007). While ambiguity of intent is present in both ostracism and incivility, ostracism often causes the target to wonder if the action is truly occurring at all (Robinson et al., 2013). This ambiguity causes employees to perceive ostracism as more socially acceptable, less psychologically harmful and less likely to be prohibited by the organization, when it is, in fact, very harmful indeed (Robinson et al., 2013).

The community building aspects of the #MeToo movement are particularly important for ostracism as compared to other forms of workplace mistreatment. At its core, ostracism is about isolation. #MeToo is the antithesis of ostracism, creating a community of belonging around its targets, thereby ending the isolation. While similarly supportive communities help targets cope with other forms of mistreatment (such as incivility or retaliation) the mere presence of these communities do not provide direct recourse. There are often formal policies or laws in place to protect individuals from incivility and retaliation in the first place, or to provide recourse to those affected. However, that is not the case for ostracism. As such, the #MeToo movement specifically addresses that gap by providing both a buffer against the negative effects of “post-disclosure ostracism” in the workplace, and recourse by shaming organizations or individuals who have actively engaged in purposeful or non-purposeful ostracism.

What are the consequences of workplace ostracism?
Although ostracism may appear to be more socially acceptable than other forms of mistreatment, the negative consequences are still very much present. Ostracism has often been called a “social death” because of its threat to targets’ perceptions of meaningful existence (Sommer et al., 2001). Theory suggests that exclusion cues feelings of mortality and death (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). When confronted with exclusion or isolation, this loss of personal attachment lowers one’s feelings of belongingness and group acceptance.
Zadro et al. (2004) even found that seemingly meaningless interactions like being ostracized by a computer program led to lower ratings on belongingness items. Being ostracized also lowers feelings of self-esteem, which is particularly harmful as maintaining a reasonably high self-esteem is essential to well-being (Neff, 2011). As an evolutionary process, ostracism functions as a way to let us know that we have done something to displease the group: perhaps, we think, there is something wrong with us personally that prompted exclusion. Even those who are aware of the possibility they are not responsible for their ostracism will experience lowered self-esteem (Smith and Williams, 2004).

Ostracism also derails targets’ feelings of control that normally occurs during bilateral exchange (Williams et al., 2000). Studies have shown that targets of ostracism attempt to regain this control in a variety of ways, some of which may be inherently anti-social. In a review, Williams (2009) explained that those who are ostracized can sometimes be more aggressive to others and less helpful. Williams and Sommer (1997) found that women, compared to men, tended to socially compensate by working harder on group tasks when coworkers ostracized them. The variations in response to ostracism highlight the extent to which targets will attempt to re-establish control over their social environments by any means necessary.

In the workplace, ostracism decreases interpersonal social interactions, making it more difficult to fulfill psychological needs. Ostracism is an influential variable in explaining lower perceptions of belongingness and reduced workplace contributions (O’Reilly and Robinson, 2009). Workplace ostracism has been shown to increase self-defeating behaviors, such as procrastination, and reduce job productivity and performance (Leung et al., 2011; Renn et al., 2013). Additionally, ostracism is associated with increases in turnover intentions, or intentions to leave the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). Compared to workplace bullying, workplace ostracism seems to have a stronger effect on work-related attitudes (such as affective commitment and psychological withdrawal), physical health and self-esteem (O’Reilly et al., 2014).

**Fear of ostracism prior to #MeToo**

Prior to #MeToo, many targets of workplace sexual harassment chose not to report their harassment for fear of ostracism and retaliation (Peirce et al., 1997). And as both past and recent history has shown, disclosing sexual harassment can negatively impact the targets of such actions. When Anita Hill disclosed her harassment and testified before the Senate Judicial Committee, the blowback in the workplace was swift. Oklahoma State Representative Leonard Sullivan led a vicious attack against Hill, claimed that she perjured herself and lied about harassment at the hands of Clarence Thomas, threatened to revoke state funding for her endowed chair and even proposed legislation to close the University of Oklahoma Law School. Incoming university President David Boren (who voted in favor of Thomas’s confirmation when he served in the US Senate) repeatedly refused to meet with Hill in order to allay Sullivan’s concerns (Casteel, 1997; Hill, 1997). This blatant ostracism contrasts somewhat with what we currently know about the recent case of Dr Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh. Although many were still quick to brand Dr Blasey Ford a liar and attack her for her testimony, her employers at Palo Alto University in California issued a statement praising her for her bravery in speaking the truth despite the consequences, and many in her community and across the nation were there to say “[...] we are here, and we have your back” (Kadvany, 2018; Palo Alto University, 2018; Sheyner, 2018).

That kind of outright, public support is crucial to targets of sexual harassment. Pershing (2003) found that nearly three quarters of surveyed female midshipmen at the US Naval Academy perceived social ostracism as a negative consequence of filing a harassment claim. Even in an organization with a known climate of harassment, midshipmen who reported
being harassed broke the informal social norms of peer loyalty and risked social rejection (Pershing, 2003). Of the women surveyed, nearly 57 percent thought someone who reported harassment would be shunned by others (Pershing, 2003). Ostracism, alongside outright retaliation, prevented women from coming forward to report harassment. These findings suggest that effective policies must address issues of isolation. Additionally, workplace context plays an important role. Many individuals in the workplace are targeted for harassment due to their minority status, and may already face heightened levels of ostracism due to their increased visibility (e.g. women in male-dominated workplaces or racial minorities in predominantly white organizations). For instance, Anita Hill was a black woman working in a career field dominated by white men. Human resource professionals and policymakers must be aware of the isolation already faced by minorities in these institutions to effectively address these challenges.

The meaning and impact of #MeToo
Overall, the #MeToo movement is best characterized as an online, social media phenomenon that specifically serves to provide support for those who disclose sexual harassment and assault. Many social media movements are characterized as calls to specific actions (e.g. #BlackLivesMatter and their various organizing efforts in support of Black communities, or #TimesUp and their establishment of the Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund). In this case, the #MeToo movement is a call to community and advocacy. Although the long-term effects of #MeToo on the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment or the impact on the believability of victims remains to be seen, we suggest that targets of sexual harassment and assault are able to utilize the support of individuals online to buffer the effects of ostracism received offline. Even if targets experience ostracism in their workplace, sharing stories online allows bystanders who are not physically present to acknowledge and support the individual in question.

As conceptualized, the #MeToo movement also serves to highlight a key facet of ostracism – the act of ostracizing is the act of withdrawing social connection and community from a person. Losing social support negatively impacts one’s sense of belongingness and self-esteem, but regaining social support, even from those not as close to you, can help manage immediate negative consequences (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2018). The substitution hypothesis indicates that belongingness can be replenished by constructing relationships with other individuals or groups after an ostracism experience (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Prior research has shown that even symbolic or parasocial relationships – illusionary experiences in which people interact with media personas – can facilitate recovery from ostracism (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2018). Anita Hill (1997) also noted the power of correspondence from those she did not know, stating: “I cannot overstate the importance of these letters, notes, and other messages. They were crucial to my endurance and ultimately my recovery” (p. 6).

In addition to being a viral social media phenomenon, the #MeToo movement may have impacted the perceptions of ostracizing sexual harassment targets from an ethical decision-making perspective by increasing bystander’s perceptions of the moral intensity of isolating victims of sexual harassment. According to Jones (1991), moral intensity consists of various components that collectively help an individual make ethical decisions, including social consensus, the magnitude of consequences and the proximity of the bystander to the victim (Bowes-Sperry and Powell, 1999).

The #MeToo movement increased social consensus regarding how we treat victims of workplace harassment: although ostracizing targets of sexual harassment is both prevalent and technically legal, it is not moral. As the movement went viral in 2017, people became more aware of acquaintances who shared #MeToo moments, increasing their proximity to harassment events and forcing people to reckon with the fact that ostracism
is both widespread and detrimental to individuals in the workforce. As victims shared the negative outcomes of their harassment, the magnitude of consequences for the victims and society as a whole was made more salient. Bowes-Sperry and Powell (1999) found that as the moral intensity of sexual harassment increases via those various components, observers are more likely to engage in intervention behaviors. These moral considerations may lead people to overcome their fears or concerns about how they might be treated for standing up for the victims. Cortina and Magley (2003) posited that bystanders engage in behaviors like ostracism to avoid being targeted or retaliated against themselves. As such, a change in the ethical climate may ensure that bystanders will view ostracism as highly immoral even with the looming threat of hardship, leading to decreased ostracism of sexual harassment targets.

In a relatively short period of time the #MeToo movement has created an alternative inclusive environment for those who might experience ostracism. Followers and supporters of the movement have provided crucial support and community for those who might otherwise be isolated. By raising awareness of just how rampant the problem is, targets of sexual harassment and abuse learned that they were not alone in their experiences. For some, the ability to connect with others online fortified them for the tiresome experience of dealing with harassment. Others, encouraged by the thousands of individuals disclosing their harassment, shared their experiences only to realize that others in their organization had suffered abuse at the hands of the same perpetrator. Women working for Nike, empowered by the advances in the #MeToo movement, conducted a secret, internal survey to determine how widespread the issues of sexual harassment and gender discrimination were. When presented to senior leadership, the results prompted widespread organizational change including the departure of multiple top male executives (Creswell et al., 2018). Thankfully, the online community is also able to provide outside pressure to ensure that while perpetrators are being held accountable, the people they victimized are treated justly. The communities at large act as a watchdog, pressuring organizations to fire the perpetrators while ensuring that the targets of sexual harassment themselves were not subjected to retaliation or purposeful ostracism.

Preventing ostracism against targets of sexual harassment

While it is difficult for many bystanders to accurately perceive the ostracism of others (O’Reilly and Banki, 2016), the plethora of negative impacts require that organizations are aware of ostracism as an outcome of reporting harassment. Minimizing the chances of ostracism toward targets of sexual harassment should be a primary concern for organizations, as perceived organizational support can mitigate many of the negative impacts of workplace ostracism (Scott et al., 2014). Even though numerous measures are in place to combat bullying, most workplaces do not have policies for those who “ignore their colleagues.” Furthermore, because ostracism can truly be accidental or caused by oversight, limiting ostracism in the workplace can be difficult to enforce.

One of the first ways to address the ostracism of sexual harassment targets is by explicitly acknowledging ostracism as a tool meant to stifle disclosure. Organizations who wish to be proactive can implement programs addressing a wide variety of exclusionary behaviors, to include ostracism. At a targeted level, these programs should focus on how these behaviors may impact employees and provide techniques that create a more cohesive work environment (O’Reilly and Banki, 2016). Because the constructs of incivility and ostracism overlap in many ways, tactics for minimizing incivility can also be applied to ostracism (Ferris et al., 2017). Research suggests that clearly stating and communicating norms to organizational members can help mitigate instances that breach expectations of mutual respect (Ferris et al., 2017). Enforcing social norms that condemn ostracism as a
retaliatory tactic could be tied to reward systems or formal evaluations (e.g. employee performance appraisals; Cortina et al., 2013; Gallus et al., 2014; Porath and Pearson, 2013; Scott and Duffy, 2015). Programs can include training to develop better interpersonal skills and conflict resolution techniques among employees. Specific to sexual harassment, such programs can help bystanders learn to show empathy toward targets of harassment and explain how to manage conflict in a careful and respectful manner so as not to accidentally ostracize individuals (O’Reilly and Banki, 2016; Robinson et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2016). Additionally, guidelines should be implemented that ensure employees know who to report to when ostracism or incivility occurs.

These programs should also acknowledge and address the fact that people of color, individuals with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities often experience high rates of discrimination, selective incivility and ostracism independent of the ostracism experienced after disclosing sexual harassment (Cortina et al., 2013; Sias, 2009; Zhang et al., 2017). Terry Crews, an Actor and former Linebacker in the National Football League, noted that he was afraid to physically defend himself against the Hollywood talent agent who sexually assaulted him, fearing the actions law enforcement would take against him as a six-foot three-inch, 240 pound black man (Andrews, 2017). However, he also noted that he “decided not to take it further because [he] didn’t want to be ostracized – par for the course when the predator has power and influence” (Grinberg, 2018). Employing an intersectional lens while developing interpersonal skills and conflict resolution programs is crucial to ensuring that targets of sexual harassment are treated equitably, as multiple minority identities can exacerbate the negative personal and professional consequences of sexual harassment-related ostracism (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991).

Going forward, it may be necessary for organizations to explicitly include ostracism within their whistleblower protections. Some organizations have taken such steps to shield employees from this often-backhanded form of retaliation. The Department of Defense (DoD) moved to protect members of the armed forces who have reported crimes like sexual harassment and assault by including social ostracism within its definition of social retaliation (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The plan defined retaliatory ostracism within all branches of military as “wrongfully excluding a military member from social acceptance or membership in or association with a group of which such military member was a part or a reasonable person would conclude wanted to be a part of” with the intent to cause emotional distress, discourage reporting of sexual harassment or assault or discourage the administration of justice concerning the offense (DoD, 2017, p. 26). Organizations should consider creating specific definitions of retaliatory ostracism that fit their work environment and enforcing it much in the same way as the DoD. At a big picture level, these programs and practices should be part of a series of organizational goals and human resource practices that develop and foster an inclusive culture.

However, we might also take a step further back and recognize that by addressing retaliation, organizations still do not “make the victim whole” (Lawton, 2007, p. 648). It is still very likely that targets who know a perpetrator of ostracism can be punished may still work to avoid ostracism in the first place (Porter, 2018). As such, organizations should work to decrease instances of sexual harassment can be punished may still work to avoid ostracism in the first place (Porter, 2018). As such, organizations should work to decrease instances of sexual harassment in the first place. Specifically, the EEOC (2016) Select Task Force on Harassment recommends against so-called “zero tolerance” policies, instead opting for what Porter (2018, p. 59) describes as “fair and proportional responses to report of harassment (after fair and thorough investigations).” This may help quell fears of so-called “#MeToo overreach” by emphasizing due process, while recognizing that many victims are seeking a means to stop the harassment rather than punish the perpetrator (Hebert, 2007). Human resource professionals should continually update organizational policies and programs to reflect best practices emerging from the vast body of workplace sexual harassment research.
Future research directions

We hope that this paper serves as a call for experimental research on the connection between sexual harassment and ostracism. To date very little research has been done to examine the ostracism experiences of those who have been targets of sexual harassment, either before or after disclosing. Given that #MeToo has provided a community of belonging for those who have been targeted, research that examines targets’ initial exclusion from their former communities can be insightful. In addition to the many directions we have yet to consider, we have provided suggestions for where empirical gaps in this literature can be filled.

Targets

Future research on retaliation should seek to answer the important questions of when and why targets of sexual harassment are likely to experience ostracism as a consequence of disclosing. The consequences of disclosing workplace sexual harassment are many and varied, and ostracism is often downplayed in light of the more explicit threats to employment or safety. Through victims’ stories we have shown that ostracism is a real fear and consequence of disclosing sexual harassment. Those coming forward have reported being shunned, passed over and even threatened with ostracism. Specifically, we believe it is important to establish the basics of this phenomenon. Future research should focus on the frequency with which this occurs and the consequences of ostracism for targets of sexual harassment: are the outcomes unique, differing from traditional consequences of ostracism? Or are they generally the same?

Most importantly, and what our paper focuses on, is the possibility of #MeToo as a buffer or coping mechanism. Future research needs to explore whether #MeToo diminishes the negative effect of ostracism, reinstating targets’ feelings of belongingness and re-fulfilling other fundamental needs. Additionally, we should examine the factors that strengthen or weaken the extent to which support from an online source outweighs the negative effects of ostracism in the workplace. These possible avenues should be explored at length to establish and explore the theoretical links we propose in this paper.

Perpetrators

Research should also expand into explaining how perpetrators of harassment use and threaten to use ostracism as a tool to silence victims. Cortina et al. (2018) have called for research to go “beyond blaming the victim,” and instead focus on how, when and why perpetrators decide to assert their dominance through the use of harassment and incivility, which we believe includes the construct of ostracism. Perpetrators use the threat of ostracism and its myriad consequences (to include loss of employment, opportunities, status and social support) to prevent disclosure. This narrative has appeared countless times when targets have later explained why they did not disclose earlier.

Additionally, it is not only the perpetrator of sexual harassment who uses ostracism as a threat or punishment for those who break the “status quo” and disclose their abuse, and we believe it is important for researchers to recognize this fact. Coworker or bystanders use ostracism as a way to protect or distance themselves from those who “make waves” or refuse to conform (Gamian-Wilk et al., 2018). In these instances, bystanders or coworkers may feel like ostracism is the best way to protect themselves, avoid conflict and avoid expressing negative sentiments or criticisms (Gamian-Wilk et al., 2018). Know when this occurs and how to prevent it from occurring would be an invaluable resource for organizations.

Finally, we recognize that allies have been able to flip the script and employ ostracism in a useful fashion by ostracizing perpetrators. While some victims are unable to pursue justice in the legal system for a variety of reasons, ostracism can serve as an alternative form of
just to punish the perpetrator. Removing a sense of belongingness and community can be very powerful. Native American and Alaska Native tribes such as the Alaskan Alutiiqs or the Lummi Nation have used banishment (i.e., “complete ostracism”) as an historical and contemporary form of justice against those disrupting life on tribal lands (Kunesh, 2007). Perpetrators are removed from their communities for a set period of time and social support is withdrawn with the hopes that the individual can modify their behavior and return. After the news of his abuse surfaced, Harvey Weinstein first found himself on the “verge of being ostracized” from Hollywood society, and was eventually expelled from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Desta, 2017). The threat of social ostracism can act as a powerful force to prompt good behavior, foster conformity with positive social norms and encourage conduct benefitting the organization as a whole (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2010). Perpetrators and would-be perpetrators are examining their own behaviors to avoid ostracism and other consequences that now stem from committing sexual harassment. Future research could examine how such ostracism as a result of perpetration encourages better future behavior in the perpetrators and bystanders, both at individual and organizational levels.

Differences in ostracism by event
As discussed earlier, ostracism is typically a tactic used to signal to that a person’s behaviors are displeasing to the individual or group. Additional research on ostracism might review how differences in events impact the experience and outcomes of ostracism. For instance, bystanders might easily recognize that it is wrong to ostracize a whistleblower, especially as the whistleblower was right to call attention to organizational wrongdoing. Conversely, we also know that targets of sexual harassment are likely to experience victim-blaming, where bystanders assign blame to the victim for their own harassment (Campbell et al., 2009). Targets may even engage in self-blame. Though targets of sexual harassment are also calling attention to organizational wrongdoings, the stigma and shame that surrounds much of the narrative regarding sexual harassment and assault could impact every facet of the ostracism experience. The characteristics of the event in question can affect a wide variety of ostracism outcomes ranging from bystander perceptions and support to organizational responses.

Intersectionality
The lack of intersectional research in both the sexual harassment and ostracism literatures was apparent in the preparation of this paper. There is very little literature addressing the consequences of being sexually harassed and subsequently ostracized, and what does exist does not always address the varying experiences of targets with multiple minority or otherwise stigmatized identities. We know that ostracism can frequently occur in response to organizational diversity. Workers who identify as African–American often experience discrimination and report being excluded or rejected (Deitch et al., 2003). Research shows that when people who identify as black or African–American are rejected they are more likely to attribute their ostracism to their race and are slower at recovering their fundamental needs, both when being ostracized by a member of their race or someone outside their race. We also see people with visible disabilities and/or physical illnesses experience social rejections because of their conditions (Wynne and McAnaney, 2009). Additionally, race, sexual minority and disability status are often linked to lower socioeconomic status (American Psychological Association, 2006; Rodgers, 2008; US Department of Labor, 2017), which is important to consider as people of color, sexual minorities and those who are differently abled are often already more likely to be ostracized. That ostracism could lead to further financial hardship for those who are already economically disadvantaged.
The #MeToo movement is rooted in the stories of young women of color. Future research should intentionally focus on these populations, as they were the catalyst for action. Researchers should strive to be concordant with the overall goal of the #MeToo movement: “[...] to speak to the needs of a broader spectrum of survivors [...] [y]oung people, queer, trans, and disabled folks, Black women and girls, and all communities of color” (MeTooMVMT, 2018). We do them a disservice by not including them in research that can possibly lend itself to strategies that affect and sustain long term, systemic change.

Conclusion
The #MeToo movement freed many individuals from the burdens that come with ostracism, allowing them to open up about their painful experiences of sexual assault and harassment. As organizations continue to reckon with the much-needed fallout of this movement, we call on organizational leaders and human resource professionals to examine the role that both purposeful and non-purposeful ostracism has on organizational climate. As clearly indicated by the number of high profile firings, covering up workplace sexual harassment has severe consequences for individuals and organizations. It is best for individuals and organizations if harassment is disclosed and dealt with. Both organizations and individuals can take proactive steps to help mitigate or prevent ostracism as a response to reports of sexual harassment, empowering targets of sexual harassment, and enabling them to come forward without the very real consequence of social isolation.

References


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High-profile sexual misconduct media triggers sex harassment recall and reinterpretation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore a possible effect of #MeToo media on individuals' personal recall and reinterpretation of sex harassment (SH) experiences. The authors experimentally examine how exposure to high-profile stories of sexual misconduct triggers memories and reinterpretation of one's own past SH experiences.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a sample of 393 US adults, participants were randomly assigned to read one of four media passages, two of which were news stories or transcripts of high-profile cases of sexual harassment or misconduct (e.g., the Trump Access Hollywood transcript), then completed the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) and follow-up questions about how the media impacted their memory of their prior SH experiences.

Findings – Sexual misconduct media stories, compared to control conditions, indirectly predicted self-report of past SH (SEQ) through both remembering and reinterpreting one’s past experiences. Gender and political ideology moderated the indirect effects such that the effects of the media stories were stronger for women and for those higher on progressive political ideology.

Practical implications – This study experimentally demonstrated what has publicly been assumed to be a driving force behind the upswing of SH reports and the seriousness by which they have been regarded during the #MeToo era: publicized stories of high-profile sexual misconduct triggers personal recall of having been sexually harassed in the past and reinterpretation of SH experiences. The #MeToo movement may be acting as a driver of social change, facilitating changes in social norms. As these social norms change, organizations should be prepared to effectively respond to a possible increase in reporting SH experiences due changes in norms around reporting SH.

Originality/value – This study uses an experimental design to investigate the role of high-profile media stories about SH as a driving force behind the #MeToo movement.

Keywords Media, Memory, #MeToo, Sex harassment

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In 2006, Tarana Burke created a movement that she hoped would bring awareness of the sexual violence experienced by women of color (Ohlheiser, 2017). In October of 2017, following high-profile cases of powerful men engaging in sexual misconduct, this movement exploded throughout the country. Survivors and targets of sexual assault and harassment began sharing #MeToo on social media in a wave that generated over 19 million tweets from October 2017 to September 2018 on Twitter alone (Anderson and Toor, 2018). According to Facebook, 4.7 million people used #MeToo in 12m posts during the first 24 hours and 45 percent of people had at least one friend who shared the hashtag #MeToo (CBS, 2017; Santiago and Criss, 2017). Between April 2017 and May 2019, 263 celebrities, politicians, CEOs and others have been accused of sexual misconduct and the number keeps rising (Vox, 2019). The 2016 presidential election played a pivotal role in the strong media documentation of the movement, with countless stories of women coming forward to accuse then-presidential candidate Donald Trump of sex harassment (SH), along with audio recording where Trump admitted perceiving that he was entitled to grab women’s bodies without permission.
It is important to delve into why the #MeToo movement started gaining momentum after the 2016 elections. Numerous accounts and public claims began to surface in media with targets of sexual misconduct stating that hearing Trump himself admit to sexually predacious conduct (i.e. the Access Hollywood recording; *New York Times*, 2016) triggered recall of past incidents similar to his behavior (see Johnson, 2018). Indeed, research has found that media stories can trigger recall effects, particularly if they are similar in trauma (Elliott, 1997). On Thursday, September 17, 2018 following Dr Christine Blasey-Ford’s testimony of her traumatizing experience at the hands of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, there was a 201 percent spike in calls to America’s National Sexual Assault Hotline compared with a typical day (Yan, 2018). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, there has not been an experimental study of how such media stories may affect the recall of one’s own sexual trauma, especially in the #MeToo context.

In this paper, we examine the prevalence of self-report rates of SH for men and women, delving into the reasons as to why incident reports have historically been low. Then, we discuss possible reasons for the unprecedented levels of SH reports within the context of the #MeToo movement, specifically why memories of sexual trauma, such as SH, may be distorted or decayed in targets’ memories and why media exposure to high-profile stories of sexual misconduct may trigger those memories. Additionally, in combination with the ambiguous understanding of SH and the wide variability in individuals’ perceptions of SH (Rotundo *et al.*, 2001), we propose that these high-profile stories of sexual misconduct facilitate a shifting norm where people recognize and claim more behaviors as SH than may have been the norm in the past as targets’ and victims’ stories of SH and abuse are being heard and believed. Finally, we present a study testing the effects of media (i.e. news stories of sexual misconduct from high-profile individuals) on SH recall and reinterpretation. We hypothesize that media exposure will increase the likelihood of recalling and reinterpreting SH experiences, which will in turn explain increases in personal reports of experiencing SH.

With such a seemingly sudden impact of the #MeToo movement, the continuation of SH allegations in the media, and the increase of targets reaching out to trauma hotlines, we focus on exposure to high-profile media on sexual exploitation and how it triggers memory recall and reinterpretation for individuals who have experienced SH in the past. Through this focus, we hope to theorize and understand what may serve as the trigger fueling the #MeToo movement. This research therefore has several contributions; first, our research uncovers specific underlying mechanisms explicating how media exposure in the era of #MeToo can influence the rise in reporting, claiming, or acknowledging personal SH experiences. While this adds to extant research and theory on the role of media in triggering memory of similar trauma (Elliott, 1997; Wiener *et al.*, 2005), our research directly brings this into the context of #MeToo. Additionally, our research on the role of media in fueling the #MeToo movement adds to important new theorizing on the impact of social norms on facilitating social change (Tankard and Paluck, 2016). Our theory specifically looks at how media and news surrounding a social issue may underly changing social norms, and in turn, facilitate social change. Thus, we bridge prior research connecting the role of media in triggering recall of past experiences and the role of social norms in facilitating social change. This research is also practically relevant, as it addresses the need to better understand the impact of the #MeToo movement for organizations. While SH has been a focus of scientific and legal inquiry since the late 1970s, in 2018, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology listed addressing SH as the number one workplace trend (SIOP, 2018). Our research indicates that as norms shift with the #MeToo movement, organizations and managers should prepare to address the impact that #MeToo media may have on their employees, specifically as exposure to this media may lead to an increase in claiming or reporting more SH experiences.
Theoretical development

Although there have been no national epidemiological surveys of the incidence of experiencing different forms of SH, a number of studies with large samples provide reasonable estimates of its prevalence in US samples over the past few decades (see Table I). SH incidence rates among federal employees appear to have precipitously declined from 1994 to 2016, as well as in military studies conducted prior to 2003 (Ilies et al., 2003) to more recent surveys conducted in 2014 (Morral et al., 2016; however, this study used a more restrictive definition and time frame for measuring SH incidence).

Rates of labeling one’s unwanted social-sexual experiences as SH are considerably lower than these behavioral incidence rates. When asked directly whether one experienced SH, the incidence rate is 24 percent (Ilies et al., 2003; c.f., Morral et al., 2016). Research has demonstrated that although the severity of the harassing event strongly influences whether the target labels it as SH (Magley et al., 1999; Stockdale et al., 1995), there are many reasons why people who have experienced SH are reluctant to call it as such. For example, although some SH behaviors are seemingly clear-cut, such as quid pro quo harassment (conditioning job outcomes on sexual cooperation), other experiences, such as unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment, are relatively more ambiguous (Rotundo et al., 2001). In fact, targets often blame themselves for ambiguous experiences of sexual misconduct instead of attributing their experiences to the harassing motives of the perpetrator (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). Consequences associated with publicly claiming to have been sexually harassed include increased stress and psychological distress (Glomb et al., 1997) and social retaliation (Cortina and Magley, 2003).

Social norms regarding how such experiences are interpreted and acted upon may have shifted with the advent of #MeToo (Tankard and Paluck, 2016), possibly affecting how people report and interpret their SH experiences. Before the #MeToo movement became a public phenomenon, avoiding or minimalizing SH experiences was normative (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). In fact, many people did not realize that the actions of the famous movie producer, Harvey Weinstein, were considered SH until the New York Attorney General’s lawsuit re-framed harassment in broader terms, which led to the realization that his harassing conduct was widespread (Schultz, 2018). He was later convicted of a career of harassing conduct. The concomitant onslaught of media exposure of sexual misconduct and SH by high-profile individuals and the shifting norms toward claiming one’s own experiences as SH or other forms of sexual assault appears to be fueling the #MeToo movement. Our research addresses the question of whether media exposure in the era of #MeToo regarding the sexual misconduct of high-profile individuals, such as President Donald Trump, increases recall and reinterpretation of personal prior experiences of SH. This helps us examine potential explanations for increased reporting of SH in the #MeToo context. Specifically, we examine the effect of high-profile media stories of sexual misconduct triggering and possibly altering individuals’ memories of their own prior SH experiences.

There is good reason to believe that personal experiences of such events are often not encoded in memory as SH, or that the memories are distorted. We propose two possible memory distortion processes that may explain why high-profile media stories of sexual misconduct affect recall of similar personal experiences (e.g. of SH): reminding and reinterpreting. Reminding may involve awareness of a completely or partially blocked prior experience. Research on betrayal trauma theory (Freyd and DePrince, 2001) indicates that knowledge isolation occurs to substantially block the memory of a traumatic event, especially when perpetrated by someone the target needs to trust, such as a parent figure or spiritual leader. Memories of these events may be triggered by an unexpected stimulus, such as seeing the name of one’s abuser in the newspaper (see examples in Freyd and DePrince, 2001). Reminding may also occur for memories whose trace has decayed, for example for memories of events that may have been unpleasant, but not necessarily traumatizing. As Tulving and Thomson (1973) explained, aspects of such
<table>
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<th>Source</th>
<th>Survey characteristics</th>
<th>Sample characteristics</th>
<th>Rates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ilies et al. (2003)</td>
<td>Behavioral experiences surveys, no time frame</td>
<td>Meta-analysis of probability samples</td>
<td>Total (%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Overall sample,</td>
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<td>Academic context,</td>
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<td>Private sector context,</td>
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<td>Government context,</td>
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<td>Military context,</td>
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<td>(n = 37,681)</td>
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<td>DOD active service members,</td>
<td>HWE (%) QPQ (%) Total (%)</td>
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<td>(n = 145,300)</td>
<td>W 21.4 M 6.58</td>
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<td>US MSPB (1994)</td>
<td>MSPB survey, 7-behavioral items, 2-year time frame</td>
<td>US Federal Employees, (n = 8,000)</td>
<td>GH (%) USA (%) SC (%) Total (%)</td>
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<td>W 37 M 14</td>
<td>W 7-29 M 2-9 7 2</td>
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<td>Expanded MSPB survey, 12-behavioral items, 2-year time frame</td>
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<td>GH (%) USA (%) SC (%) Total (%)</td>
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<td>5.4-12.3 W 1.4-2.9 0.5-2.5 0.5-1.1</td>
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Notes: W, women; M, men; HWE, hostile work environment; QPQ, quid pro quo; GH, gender harassment; USA, unwanted sexual attention; SC, sexual coercion

Table I. Prevalence of sex harassment experiences from select large-scale US surveys and meta-analysis.
memories are stored in deep memory but have nodes in conscious memory. A triggering event activates the associations between those nodes, sparking a memory of the past event. This may explain why individuals may occasionally recall some event or experience from their past that they believed they had forgotten (Elliott, 1997). Memory cues are stimuli related to some event or experience that help facilitate the recall of information related to that event or experience (Jaimes et al., 2004). In the #MeToo movement, we believe that the on-going cycle of high-profile media stories calling out powerful men who have engaged in sexual misconduct act as memory cues, increasing individuals’ recall of prior social-sexual experience.

Reinterpretation of the memory of a past experience involves a change in semantic memory or “meaning” of the experience from past to present. In the context of SH, one’s reinterpretation may have shifted from encoding the experience with ambiguity to now recalling it with a clearer sense of wrongness, and possibly with a new label: sexual harassment. The history of discourse on SH, such as the victim-blaming endured by Anita Hill, and the mountain of evidence of the vagaries in perceptions of SH (e.g. Rotundo et al., 2001) suggests that it is quite likely for individuals to have encoded their ambiguous, initial experiences of SH in an ill-formed manner. Furthermore, “audience turning,” in which individuals’ initial semantic encoding of an event is shaped to align with how they believe a relevant audience’s opinion or attitude toward the event will be (Pierucci et al., 2014), provides a theoretical explanation for the reinterpretation of SH memories. Pierucci et al. (2014) theorized that an ambiguous understanding of a potentially threatening event, such as SH, creates a need for an epistemic, shared interpretation of it. Hence, the communicator forms a message about the alleged perpetrator or experience that conforms to their perception of the audience’s pre-existing attitude toward the perpetrator or experience. If that attitude is positive, the communicator’s message about the alleged harassing event is positive, and similarly if negative.

To the extent that SH has been shrouded in controversy and ambiguity, individuals who have experienced such an event may have interpreted it to align with friends’, coworkers’, supervisors’ or the general public’s perceived beliefs about such phenomena – that is, perhaps to minimize it. However, during the time of the #MeToo movement when social norms and the public’s attitude shifted from disbelief or ambiguity to an outcry of wrongness, a triggering event like a significant media story of sexual misconduct may cause individuals to not only remember their former SH experience(s), but to also reinterpret it as an unwanted experience of SH. We posit that this shift in the general public’s attitudes about SH may be facilitating more reinterpretation of prior events, such that targets can now alter the “tune” of their message to fit with the audience’s new attitudes about SH.

National and ubiquitous news stories and media attention of high-profile cases and claims of SH allegedly perpetrated by men in powerful and prominent positions may impact rates of individuals labeling, claiming and reporting SH. Indeed, prior research has shown that media coverage of perpetrators and harassers influences one’s recall of their own harassment experiences (Wiener et al., 2005). To clarify, we are not proposing or hypothesizing that the prevalence of SH has increased during the #MeToo movement, but that the dramatic increase in media attention toward high-profile cases of SH and sexual misconduct affects the rates at which individuals self-report experiences that may be construed as SH specifically by increasing recall and reinterpretation of personal SH experiences. That is, in light of the #MeToo era, individuals may be more willing to say they have experienced SH, may be reminded more often of their personal SH experiences, and/or may be reinterpreting previous experiences as SH. Thus, we propose that media stories about SH and sexual misconduct which are central to the #MeToo movement, will indirectly effect the number of SH experiences participants report through being reminded of and reinterpreting previous personal experiences of SH. Additionally, because rates of experiencing SH are higher among
women compared to men (Ilies et al., 2003) and because the high-profile cases of calling out SH have been claims by women against powerful men (Vox, 2019), we expect that these indirect effects will be stronger for women compared to men:

\[ H_1. \] Compared to non-harassment media stories, media about SH will positively impact the extent to which participants are reminded of past unwanted social-sexual experiences, in turn, being reminded of these experiences will positively impact self-reports of SH experiences. Additionally, this indirect effect will be moderated by participants’ gender, such that the effects will be stronger for women compared to men.

\[ H_2. \] Compared to non-harassment media stories, media about SH will positively impact the extent to which participants reinterpret past unwanted social-sexual experiences, in turn, reinterpreting these experiences will positively impact self-reports of SH experiences. Additionally, this indirect effect will be moderated by participants’ gender, such that the effects will be stronger for women compared to men.

Finally, as the #MeToo movement has been widely politicized, starting with the 2016 presidential race and carrying over into many widely publicized high-profile cases, like that of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, and because we included the Access Hollywood media transcript involving President Trump, we conducted supplemental analyses to investigate the potential moderating role of political ideology. Because one of our media events was about President Trump’s claim, before he became president, of molesting women (Access Hollywood tape), and he is affiliated with the conservative, Republican party, we explored whether individuals who identify with conservative political ideology would be less triggered by media stories of his and other’s sexual exploitation than those who identify with progressive political ideology.

**Method**

**Participants**
A sample of 399 adults residing in the USA were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Six participants failed the manipulation check which required them to identify the topic of the article they were asked to read; consequently, the final sample consisted of 393 participants, 181 men (46 percent) and 212 women (54 percent). The average age of our sample was 38 years old (SD = 12), and the average work tenure was 16.3 years (SD = 11.7). The sample was predominantly White (80 percent), 9 percent identified as African-American or Black, 6 percent identified as Latinx or Hispanic and 6 percent identified as Asian or Asian-American. Participants mostly identified as heterosexual (82 percent). The majority of participants obtained a Bachelor’s degree (38.4 percent) or had some college experience (33.8 percent), with an additional 14.8 percent holding Master’s, Doctoral, or professional degrees. We also collected political party information, and 44.3 percent of participants identified as Democrats, 30.3 percent as independents and 21.1 percent as Republicans.

**Materials and measures**

**Media stories.** We culled four news articles from various media sources, two of which described high-profile incidents of sexual misconduct, a third which was traumatizing but not related to sexual misconduct, and a fourth which was not traumatizing nor related to sexual misconduct. The first was the transcript of President Donald Trump making vulgar comments about women (e.g. “Grab ’em by the pussy. You can do anything”; published in the New York Times, 2016; Access Hollywood condition). The second was a news report of USA. Gymnastics physician, Dr Larry Nassar’s sexual misconduct trial and charges (e.g. “[…]Nassar admitted that as a doctor, he was in a position of authority over
his victims, and that he used that position to coerce them to submit [...]”; published in The Indianapolis Star, Adams, 2018; Nassar condition). The third story was a transcript of a phone recording from the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (e.g. “[...] the fresh air is going down fast! I’m not exaggerating” aired by ABC News, 2018; 9/11 condition); and the fourth story was a news report on the current shortage of pilots (e.g. “A shortage of pilots is causing airlines to rethink their approach to landing talent,” published by The Courier, Miller, 2018; Control condition). Participants assigned to either of the first two stories were combined into a condition labeled “Sexual Misconduct Stories,” whereas participants assigned to either of the last two stories were combined into a condition labeled “Control Stories.”

Sexual experience questionnaire. Participants’ previous experiences of SH were measured with the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; $\alpha = 0.93$). This measure is a behaviorally-based measure of SH, which does not use the term “sexual harassment” (or related terms) in the instructions or questions, rather it assesses how often the respondent has experienced various SH behaviors, such as “someone tried to attempt to discuss sexual matters with you,” “had sexist comments made to you,” or “someone touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable.” The SEQ consisted of 16 items which measured three unique types of SH; 5 items measured gender harassment (GH – gender-based degrading, humiliating comments and behaviors; $\alpha = 0.84$), 7 items measured unwanted sexual attention (USA – unreciprocated sexual “come-ons”; $\alpha = 0.89$), 4 items measured sexual coercion (SC – conditioning job or academic-related consequences on sexual cooperation; $\alpha = 0.84$). In addition, we added four items from the Sexual Harassment of Men Scale (Berdahl et al., 1996; Waldo, Berdahl and Fitzgerald, 1998), labeled not man enough harassment (NME; $\alpha = 0.77$). A parallel set of items to the NME was also created for women, labeled not woman enough harassment (NWE; $\alpha = 0.78$). For each item on the SEQ, participants were asked to indicate how often, if ever, they had experienced that type of behavior from someone they work with or have worked with previously using three response options: never (coded as 0), once (coded as 1), more than once (coded as 2). SEQ total scores (including totals for each subscale) were computed through sums to make these variables interpretable as a frequency measure.

SH labeling. In addition to the SEQ items, participants were asked the criterion question if they had ever been sexually harassed, with response options identical to those of the SEQ: never (coded as 0), once (coded as 1), more than once (coded as 2). Although the SEQ measured actual SH behaviors, this question measured one’s labeling of being sexually harassed.

SH follow-up questionnaire. Participants completed eight single-item questions regarding SH experiences. Participants were asked about: the extent to which the passage they read reminded them of past unwanted social-sexual experiences, the extent to which they had forgotten about past unwanted social-sexual experiences prior to reading the passage, the extent to which the passage they read caused them to reinterpret past unwanted social-sexual experiences, defined as giving the incident(s) a different label or seeing them in a different light, when the SH occurred with three response options: more than two years ago, within the past two years, or still occurring, the gender of the harasser, if they reported their harassment to an authority, such as a manager, a Human Resources or related office, or the police, their satisfaction with reporting, if they indicated that they reported and if they did not report previously, if they would be more inclined to report it now if it took place again. We used single items to assess these questions to reduce survey fatigue, and because the constructs were narrow and unambiguous (Wanous et al., 1997).

Political ideology. Participants’ political ideology was measured via a single-item on the demographic questionnaire with a five-point Likert-type scale from (1) strongly conservative
to (5) strongly progressive. Scores were coded such that higher scores represented more a progressive ideology and lower scores represented a more conservative ideology.

**Familiarity with passage.** As our stimulus material included real stories that had been highly publicized in the previous few years, we include participants’ familiarity with the passage as a control variable. Controlling for participants’ familiarity with the story, particularly for the SH stimulus material, is important since some participants may have previously been exposed to the stories or other media coverage of the events in the passages. This allows us to more conservatively test our hypotheses with real stories, as even re-exposure to media may still influence participants. Participants were asked “to what extent were you familiar with the passage you read before participating in this study?” and rated their familiarity on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) not at all familiar to (5) very familiar.

**Procedure**
Participants completed an online experiment hosted on the Qualtrics survey platform. They were randomly assigned to one of the four story conditions. After reading their respective news article, participants completed the expanded SEQ (participants were assigned by their gender to complete either the NME or NWE items) and follow-up questions and a demographic questionnaire. The study took approximately 10 min to complete and participants were paid $0.50 upon completion.

**Results**
**Rates of experiencing sexual harassment**
We first present the rates of experiencing SH among our sample of participants. Table II shows the rates of SH experiences in our sample organized by participant’s gender. When asked about experiences of SH using the behavioral experiences SEQ, 89.6 percent of respondents marked that they had experienced at least one instance of SH at work. Women were most likely to experience gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention, whereas men were most likely to experience gender harassment. Almost twice as many women (73.1 percent) than men (39.2 percent) labeled their experiences as SH. These labeling rates are dramatically higher than previous estimates from the early 1990s (e.g. Stockdale et al., 1995), which ranged from 8.7 percent (undergraduate men) to 37.5 percent (female university staff), and from the meta-analysis of direct query measures of SH estimated to be between 24 percent and 51 percent for women (Ilies et al., 2003).

Further, 76.8 percent of female participants said that the incident happened more than two years ago, 22.2 percent said that the incident happened within the past two years and only 1.0 percent said that it was happening currently. In total, 85 percent of male participants said that the incident happened more than two years ago, 13.3 percent said that the incident happened within the past two years and 1.7 percent said that it was happening currently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever (%)</th>
<th>Past two years (%)</th>
<th>Ongoing (%)</th>
<th>SH labeling (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEQ total</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GH</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NME/NWE</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** SEQ, sexual experiences questionnaire; GH, gender harassment; USA, unwanted sexual attention; SC, sexual coercion; NME/NWE, not man/woman enough. Incident rates of GH, USA, SC and NME/NWE cannot be estimated from our data as participants may have experienced more than one type of harassment category as SH.
These rates are far more comparable to previous large surveys which ask about SH experiences in shorter time frames, such as in the past two years (see Tables I and II). Additionally, of those who experienced at least one instance of SH at work in the last two years, only 9.6 percent of respondents said that they reported the incident to someone in authority (2.5 percent of men and 15 percent of women). However, 16 percent of men and 35 percent of women who did not report their experience said that they would be more inclined to report it if it happened today.

**Preliminary analysis**

Table III provides a summary of means, standard deviations and correlations for study variables by respondent gender. Unsurprisingly, there were significant gender differences in the amount of prior SH experiences, such that women indicated more SH experiences than men on all dimensions of the SEQ. The correlation matrix also shows that our proposed mediators, reminded and reinterpreted, were positively and significantly related to our outcome, SEQ scores, for both men and women.

To examine the effects of media exposure on proposed mediators (being reminded and reinterpreting) and outcomes (SEQ total score, SH labeling), we conducted one-way ANOVA. There was no effect of media story condition on SEQ total, $F(1, 390) = 0.02, p = 0.88$; or SH label ($1, 390) = 0.26, p = 0.61$. However, media story condition was significantly associated with being reminded, $F(1, 390) = 21.25, p < 0.001$; and with reinterpretation, $F(1, 390) = 6.17, p < 0.01$. The means of these conditions are depicted in Figure 1, showing that being reminded and reinterpretation were much higher for those reading the Access Hollywood or Nassar story than for those reading either of the control stories.

Although there was no difference between conditions on SEQ scores, we still tested for mediation effects, as Preacher and Hayes (2004) and Hayes (2013) explain that it is not necessary to show a direct effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable to test for and show mediation. That is, if an independent variable can causally increase a mediator, and if that mediator is significantly related to dependent variable, and the indirect effect is significant, then an inference of mediation is supported.

**Hypothesis testing**

To test $H1$ and $H2$, we conducted tests for moderated mediation analyses using Hayes (2013) Process Model 7 and 10,000 bootstrap samples to test the indirect effect. Control stories (i.e. control and 9/11) were coded as 0 and the sexual misconduct stories (i.e. Nassar and Access Hollywood conditions) were coded as 1. Passage familiarity served as a covariate. $H1$ proposed that being reminded of personal memories of SH experiences would mediate the relationship between media condition and number of SH experiences, measured by the SEQ, and that this indirect effect would be stronger for women compared to men. Similarly, $H2$ proposed that reinterpretation would mediate such effects, moderated by gender. Figure 2 displays the results of the moderated mediation analysis testing $H1$. Sexual misconduct stories (compared to control stories) significantly increased being reminded of one’s own SH experiences for women ($b = 1.38, SE = 0.34, t = 4.074, p < 0.001$) and for men ($b = 0.83, SE = 0.15, t = 5.21, p < 0.01$). In turn, being reminded of previous SH experiences significantly predicted SEQ scores ($b = 3.48, SE = 0.45, t = 7.63, p < 0.001$). The direct effect of condition predicting SEQ was not significant ($b = -0.20, SE = 1.16, t = -1.72, p = 0.08$).

Additionally, there was a significant interaction between media condition and gender predicting the extent to which participants were reminded of previous personal SH experiences ($b = 0.55, SE = 0.22, t = 2.56, p < 0.01$). Figure 3 depicts the nature of this interaction, which shows that the effect of SH Media on the extent to which participants were reminded of prior SH experiences was stronger for women compared to men. The conditional indirect effect of media condition on SEQ scores through being reminded of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women (M, SD)</th>
<th>Men (M, SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Media Condition</td>
<td>0.50 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.50 (0.50)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SEQ</td>
<td>15.83 (10.79)*</td>
<td>12.12 (9.78)</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.87**</td>
<td>0.93**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.80**</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SEQ – GH</td>
<td>5.28 (3.42)*</td>
<td>4.48 (3.45)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.89**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SEQ – USA</td>
<td>6.69 (4.83)*</td>
<td>4.72 (4.32)</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.92**</td>
<td>0.77**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SEQ – SC</td>
<td>0.98 (1.94)*</td>
<td>0.65 (1.46)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SEQ – NME/NWE</td>
<td>2.89 (0.54)*</td>
<td>2.27 (2.57)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.79**</td>
<td>0.66**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Labeling</td>
<td>1.22 (0.84)*</td>
<td>0.60 (0.81)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.50*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reminded</td>
<td>1.90 (1.31)*</td>
<td>1.50 (0.92)</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Reinterpreted</td>
<td>1.57 (1.02)</td>
<td>1.42 (0.84)</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Forgot</td>
<td>2.58 (1.54)</td>
<td>2.50 (1.58)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Political Ideology</td>
<td>3.43 (1.17)</td>
<td>3.32 (1.16)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Media Familiarity</td>
<td>2.25 (1.49)</td>
<td>2.24 (1.47)</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Correlations between study variables are presented by gender, with correlations for women below the diagonal, and correlations for men above the diagonal; Scale reliabilities are bolded on the diagonal. Media Condition coded as 0 – Control and 9/11, 1 – Access Hollywood and Larry Nassar n(women) = 212; n(men) = 181.

*Indicates significant mean mean differences by gender at \( p < 0.05 \). ** \( p < 0.01 \).
previous SH experiences was significant for women ($ab = 2.87, SE = 0.53, 95\% CI: 1.52 to 4.48$), and insignificant for men ($ab = 0.95, SE = 0.53, 95\% CI: −0.06 to 2.05$). Simple slopes analysis confirms a significant effect of media condition on being reminded for women ($b = 1.38, t = 4.08, p < 0.001$), and for men ($b = 0.83, t = 5.217, p < 0.001$). These results provide support for $H1$.

In support of $H2$, sexual misconduct stories (compared to control stories) significantly increased reinterpreting for women ($b = 0.79, SE = 0.29, t = 2.73, p < 0.01$) and for men ($b = 0.44, SE = 0.14, t = 3.28, p < 0.01$). In turn, reinterpreting previous SH experiences significantly predicted SEQ scores ($b = 3.03, SE = 0.56, t = 5.45, p < 0.001$). The direct effect of condition predicting SEQ was not significant ($b = 0.65, SE = 0.39, t = 1.64, p = 0.10$) (Figure 4).

Gender moderated the effect of media condition on reinterpretation ($b = 0.34, SE = 0.18, t = 1.86, p = 0.05$). Figure 3 depicts the nature of this interaction, which shows that the effect of SH media on the extent to which participants reinterpreted prior SH experiences was stronger for women compared to men. The conditional indirect effect of media condition on SEQ scores through reinterpreting previous SH experiences was significant for women ($ab = 1.35, SE = 0.52, 95\% CI: 0.47 to 2.48$), but not for men ($ab = 0.31, SE = 0.39, 95\% CI: −0.51 to 1.10$).
Additionally, we conducted multiple-mediation analyses using Hayes (2013) Process Model 6 to determine if one of these mediating mechanisms was stronger. Results reveal that the indirect effect for reminded ($ab = 1.71$, SE = 0.52, 95% CI: 0.79 to 2.80) was stronger than the indirect effect for reinterpreted ($ab = -0.01$, SE = 0.10, 95% CI: -0.22 to 0.22).

**Supplemental analyses**
For analyses examining our research question regarding political ideology, we again used Hayes (2013) Process Model 7 and 10,000 bootstrap samples to test the indirect effects and looked at the conditional indirect effects for those one standard deviation below the mean on
political ideology (i.e. relatively more conservative) and one standard deviation above the mean (i.e. relatively more progressive). There was a significant interaction between media condition and political ideology ($b = 0.29$, SE = 0.09, $t = 3.05$, $p < 0.01$), such that the effect of condition on the extent to which one was reminded of prior SH experiences was stronger for those who were relatively more progressive compared to those who were relatively more conservative (see Figure 5). The conditional indirect effects were stronger for progressives ($ab = 3.18$, SE = 0.69, 95% CI: 1.86 to 4.62) and insignificant for conservatives ($ab = 0.88$, SE = 0.58, 95% CI: −0.21 to 2.08). Similarly, there was significant interaction between condition and political ideology when looking at the extent to which one reinterpreted prior SH experiences ($b = 0.25$, SE = 0.08, $t = 3.05$, $p < 0.01$). As can be seen in Figure 5, the
relationship between condition and reinterpretation was stronger for progressives compared to conservatives. The conditional indirect effects were significant for progressives ($ab = 1.59, SE = 0.52, 95\% CI: 0.72 to 2.77$) and insignificant for conservatives ($ab = -0.01, SE = 0.38, 95\% CI: -0.75 to 0.80$).

**Discussion**

This study experimentally demonstrated what has been publicly assumed to be a driving force behind the upswing of SH reports and the seriousness by which they have been regarded during the #MeToo era: publicized stories of high-profile sexual misconduct, including one by a man who would become President of the USA, triggers personal recall of having been sexually harassed in the past. As shown by our descriptive data in Table II, we found substantially higher lifetime incidents of SH than have been reported in prior research. However, our two-year incident rates were comparable. This means that a substantial number of people had the potential to have their memories of SH be triggered by high-profile media stories of sexual misconduct. Specifically, those who read media about SH or sexual misconduct were reminded of and reinterpreted previous SH experiences, which in turn positively impacted (i.e. increased) self-reports of SH experiences.

Additionally, social norms seem to be changing regarding SH, largely due to the #MeToo movement and the many high-profile claims of SH against powerful men which have received quite a bit of media attention as of late. Our results indicate that this type of media reminds individuals of their previous SH experiences and facilitates reinterpretation of incidents that they may not have labeled as SH previously, but which they now do, helping to explain the increased rates of reporting SH experiences overall. As expected, these effects were stronger for women compared to men, especially to the extent that the sexual misconduct media stories, which were of male-perpetrated assault on women, may have reminded them of their own prior SH experiences. The effects were also stronger for those identifying with progressive political ideology, perhaps because one of the stories (Access Hollywood) was of a conservative candidate for President, and conservative participants may have not been as disturbed by the Access Hollywood story as those who opposed Donald Trump politically.

**Theoretical contributions**

Our findings support Elliott’s (1997) and Wiener and colleagues’ (2005) finding on media’s influence on memory recall regarding SH. Additionally, our findings offer new theoretical insights for SH and reporting behaviors using the role of media exposure, suggesting that media exposure reminds and may help targets reinterpret previous similar experiences covered in the media by powerful men. The #MeToo movement may also alter audience tuning effects such that targets are more likely to perceive that their audience will be attentive to their claims of SH and thus they will tune and encode their stories as blaming the perpetrator instead of minimizing or blaming themselves (Pierucci *et al.*, 2014). Future research could examine how targets tell their stories of SH to others as a function of being primed by news stories of sexual misconduct.

Additionally, our findings may speak to the unique and powerful effect media can have on both social movements and social norms. Tankard and Paluck (2016) explain the critical role of perceptions about social norms in facilitating social change – our study lends additional support to this theory as media is a critical tool in building perceptions of social norms. As the #MeToo movement progresses and more and more stories receive attention where a target calls out or names a harasser, or explains their story, perceptions about the appropriateness of admitting, claiming, reporting, or labeling one’s experience as SH increases. This change in perceptions about the social norms regarding SH could dramatically help facilitate positive social change. However, the differential effects of
political ideology that we found may indicate a divide in perceptions about social norms. Our findings are consistent with research on the impact of myside bias, or the tendency to evaluate and generate evidence skewed toward one’s own prior attitudes (Čavojová et al., 2018; Stanovich et al., 2013). There may be one perception largely shared by progressives that norms have shifted and talking about SH is more acceptable and those listening will respond with more empathy rather than immediately discounting such experiences. The perception of social norms of those who adhere to conservative ideologies, however, may be more prone to protecting the status quo. This is important for future research and theorizing on SH and #MeToo, as it shows the need for considering prior attitudes or political ideology in the context of sexual harassment and changing social norms. As the myside bias influences individuals’ evaluation of evidence, the effects of media on changing social norms remains theoretically and practically relevant in our current political climate. Specifically, this is important as researchers and practitioners look for answers on how individuals can “bridge the divide” and have productive conversations about value-laden topics and issues, such as SH.

**Practical implications**

A critical practical implication of our findings is that organizations need to consider re-examining their policies and practices with regard to SH so that they may be better prepared to effectively handle the possible rise in SH reports or claims as norms and perceptions of norms shift. Organizations should create fair and safe reporting procedures and ensure that employees understand what SH is in comparison to their own perceptions of SH. Additionally, organizations should work toward facilitating a positive organizational climate free from SH. Future research can also investigate the impact the #MeToo movement and the prevalent media coverage of SH perpetrated by powerful men has on employees’ intentions to formally report SH experiences. Minimally, organizations should be prepared to effectively respond to a likely increase in the percentage of individuals who report SH experiences – not necessarily because the incident rates have increased, but rather the norms for identifying such experiences as SH are changing. In our survey, 16 percent of men and 35 percent of women who did not report their experience said that they would be more inclined to report it if it happened today, which indicates that this is likely to impact organizations.

In 2018, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a report on SH in which they stated that “we are encouraged by the research that suggests that the most potent predictor of SH is organizational climate – the degree to which those in the organization perceive that SH is or is not tolerated. An important component of organizational climate toward SH is the degree to which claimants will be believed (Hulin et al., 1996). Institutions can take concrete steps to reduce SH by making system-wide changes that demonstrate how seriously they take this issue and that reflect that they are listening to those who courageously speak up to report their SH experiences” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; preface p. x). Organizations should be prepared to effectively handle claims of SH, but moreover, organizations can meaningfully participate in the #MeToo movement by taking concrete steps to change and improve their culture and climate.

**Limitations**

Our research has limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, we used an online panel convenience sample of moderate size (n = 393). One concern with data from online samples and specifically data collected through online panel platforms such as MTurk is quality of data, as participants may be careless in their responding. Therefore, as recommended by Porter, Outlaw, Gale and Cho (2018) we took multiple steps to ensure quality of our data,
including qualifying questions, a manipulation check, and a minimum amount of time spent on the media condition page. We also think there are many strengths to using an online sample for a study such as ours, including that it provided us with participants from across the USA who were diverse, especially in terms of age, education, political party, work tenure and industry. Further, by using an online panel platform we were able to recruit participants that likely work in a wide variety of workplaces and thus, are not subject to the same organizational norms and policies with regard to SH. Finally, our participants did not know that they would be completing a survey of their SH experiences, therefore they were not motivated by that potential expectation to participate in the study.

In addition to sample considerations, our study used actual media stories and transcripts that were relevant to high-profile news stories (e.g. Access Hollywood and 9/11). As such, these media stories were not standardized in length or writing style, and participants may have had differing levels of familiarity with the media stories. We purposely chose real stories in order to examine how they affected the recall of one’s own SH experiences, ensuring more external and ecological validity of our study. We chose stories that varied by type of trauma (sexual misconduct vs terrorism), and by degree of trauma (trauma vs no trauma) to address potential alternative explanations for differences in SEQ scores by media story. Additionally, we controlled for participants’ familiarity with these stories in order to assuage concerns that exposure to the media had previously influenced our participants. Thus, our analyses were, if anything, a more conservative test of our hypotheses. Future research may look at how ambiguous vs unambiguous, and more extreme vs less extreme cases of SH in the media may additionally impact SH reports.

Conclusion

This study confirms that media exposure of powerful men and their sexual misconduct increased individuals’ recall and reinterpretation of past harassment experiences, such that being reminded of previous past SH experiences and reinterpreting such experiences increased the self-report of past SH experiences. Gender moderated these mediated relationships, indicating that being reminded and reinterpreting prior SH experiences were stronger for women compared to men. Given the political context of the #MeToo movement, we explored the moderating effect of political ideology on these mediated effects, finding stronger effects for progressives compared to conservatives. High-profile cases of SH discussed prominently in the media may be fueling the #MeToo movement because they facilitate recall and reinterpretations of past SH experiences, in turn these reinterpretations and recall lead to more self-reports of SH. This cycle of high-profile media stories about SH leading to more #MeToo stories is fueling an important movement and could be shifting perceptions of social norms. As these social norms change, organizations should be prepared to effectively respond to a likely increase in reporting SH experiences, not necessarily due to an increase in incidents, but rather a change in the norms around reporting SH.

References


Further reading


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Sharing #MeToo on Twitter: incidents, coping responses, and social reactions

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine 2,102 #MeToo tweets and focuses on the content of the tweets and social reactions to these tweets. For a subsample of 912 tweets that included disclosures of sexual assault or harassment, the incident type and context, along with coping were also examined.
Design/methodology/approach – #MeToo tweets were retrieved from a 24 h time period immediately after the initial tweet prompting responses. Both sentiment analysis and content and context analyses were performed.
Findings – Although the overall sentiment of tweets indicated a negative tone, the majority of positive social reactions indicated validation and belief of survivors, offered emotional support and called for social change. Targets who disclosed generally described workplace harassment and assertive coping responses.
Research limitations/implications – Sentiment analysis can be limited given a lack of context. Not all targets using #MeToo shared details of their harassment or assault; those who did reported using more assertive coping responses than traditional samples of survivors.
Practical implications – Social media platforms offer unique opportunities for targets to share personal stories and receive emotional and social support they may not have access in-person.
Social implications – #MeToo provided targets with a groundswell of social and emotional support, along with a less frequent amount of backlash against the movement.
Originality/value – A multimethod approach was used with both sentiment analysis and text coding to examine #MeToo, allowing for a description of types of incidents shared, coping strategies and social reactions.
Keywords Disclosure, Harassment
Paper type Research paper

Recent activism and solidarity among targets of sexual harassment and assault have centered largely on social media posts that allow targets to describe their experiences and interact with a large audience. We focus in the current study on the incidents disclosed by survivors of harassment and assault using #MeToo and we examine the social reactions of others to #MeToo. With the increased use and reach of social media, it is important to recognize that these platforms are being used to disclose harassment and assault, and survivors should be aware of the range of social reactions they may encounter online. Social media represents an outlet that can expand one’s support networks as well as invite backlash. We conducted both descriptive and comparative analyses of the content and sentiment of #MeToo tweets as well as analyses of coping strategies referenced by survivors. #MeToo is a global movement that encourages survivors to publicly express solidarity based on their own experiences; these tweets may be relatively more inclusive in terms of content than those obtained via convenience surveys or those resulting from targeted campus or workplace surveys that focus on only one setting or specific behaviors. The primary goals of this study were to understand the nature of coping mechanisms, types of sentiment expressed, and their links with types of harassment and assault incidents disclosed using #MeToo.
Twitter, the #MeToo movement and social activism

The “MeToo” movement (prior to its hashtag) began in 2007 as a show of advocacy and empathy for survivors and it recently gained attention in 2017 on the social media platform Twitter beginning with a short post known as a “tweet” (in 2017, tweets were limited to 140 characters). Alyssa Milano, an American actress, initially used #MeToo in a tweet on October 15, 2017 to encourage users to share their own experiences, writing “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (Milano, 2017). Milano (@Alyssa_Milano) has a recent history of using her celebrity status to advocate for social justice causes and her reach on Twitter is wide, with over 3.4 million followers (i.e. subscribers) in 2017. The initial #MeToo tweet reached many of her followers, who then retweeted (i.e. copied and re-posted) the message, resulting in a snowball effect with hundreds of thousands of posts within 24 h (Anderson and Toor, 2018). The use of the MeToo hashtag, which is a searchable term, continued throughout 2017 and into 2018 with more than 19 million tweets from October 15, 2017 to September 30, 2018; on average, more than 53,000 tweets per day[1] (Anderson and Toor, 2018). Millions of tweets have now documented survivors’ stories (Park, 2017), including descriptions of various types of sexual assault and harassment, discussions of misogyny in the entertainment industry and national politics (Anderson and Toor, 2018).

Twitter, with its 140 character space limitation (increased to 280 in February 2018), encourages short comments and allows for other users to either comment in response to the original post or to “retweet” (akin to copying and pasting while crediting the original poster)[2]. Survivors who disclose are likely aware that their stories could potentially reach millions; Twitter had 330 million active users in the third quarter of 2017 during the time #MeToo was launched (Twitter, 2017). Online disclosure allows survivors to widely share their stories, seek information, and receive emotional and instrumental support from others outside their face-to-face networks.

The use of searchable hashtags such as #MeToo allows for the rapid development of a large-scale social movement. An online community is created where users can share grievances and emotions, discuss identity-related issues, share resources and create momentum for physical protests. LeFebvre and Armstrong (2018) described the US-based #Ferguson movement, which arose in response to concern about the nature of police officers’ interactions with racial minorities after an officer-involved shooting and death in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. #Ferguson was used to prompt social media users to describe their encounters with structural racism and to discuss the shooting.

The #MeToo movement followed a similar model in that grievances were tied to incidents of assault, harassment or misogyny; the initial tweet on October 15, 2017 encouraged momentum; and several celebrities acted as key figures. Notably, the development of #MeToo varied from other online social activism in that there was not a clear mobilization effort for physical protest tied to the online movement. Rather, #MeToo created an opportunity for social media users to report their own experiences as either targets or bystanders to assault and harassment and to indicate sympathy for survivors. This points to variations in the nature of online activism. Below, we examine the dynamics of social media as they relate to disclosures of assault and harassment and social reactions to these disclosures.

Online disclosures and social reactions

Although the initial #MeToo tweet prompted users to indicate their solidarity via shared experiences, some Twitter users did not disclose personal stories but instead provided social reactions to #MeToo. This is not unlike more general online disclosure prompts; in an examination of over 1,900 tweets from 2014 related to depression, a third were direct disclosures from depressed individuals, and an additional 40 percent were either supportive
or helpful reactions to the disclosures that encouraged help-seeking or provided information (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016). The remaining tweets were mainly discussions of substance use and depression, or work-related pressures but did not necessarily take on a negative tone.

It is important to note that although social media is a forum where users can post messages of support, it also allows for the anonymous expression of backlash or bullying. Specific to #MeToo, Manikonda et al. (2018) reported that some uses of the hashtag were posts that questioned the movement or illustrated backlash. Non-targets’ reactions to others’ disclosures using #MeToo have not yet been examined, but we expected to find supportive comments as well as skeptical responses.

In another empirical study examining social reactions to disclosures of sexual victimization prompted by a similar hashtag (#NotOkay) a year prior to #MeToo, Bogen et al. (2019) categorized Twitter users’ responses. Five categories reflected positive reactions (i.e. emotional support, advocacy, informational aid, validation/belief and bystander intervention) and two categories reflected negative reactions (i.e. distraction and egocentrism). In total, 61 percent of tweets from within ten days following the first use of #NotOkay were positive social reactions, with the most common responses reflecting bystander intervention (i.e. stepping in on behalf of survivors to point out problematic responses to disclosures; comprising 40 percent of all tweets) and emotional support (i.e. reassurance that the assault was not the survivor’s fault; 13 percent of all tweets).

Although distracting and egocentric tweets (24 and 14 percent of all tweets, respectively) were categorized as negative in their typology, Bogen et al. pointed out that distraction could be interpreted as positive or negative sentiment. In fact, the content of many of the tweets coded as distraction reported a sense of satisfaction that #NotOkay was raising awareness. There is much to be gained by examining social reactions to online disclosures; we expand Bogen et al.’s (2019) typology of social reactions to include personal disclosure tweets that allow for a broader examination of coping and contextual details.

Coping with harassment and the impact of social reactions

By assessing personal disclosures of assault and harassment, we were also able to examine self-described coping strategies using existing theories and frameworks of trauma-based coping. Hobfoll (1991) emphasized that severe psychological consequences follow from situations where targets’ core beliefs are threatened or they perceive that they do not have adequate coping strategies. Assault and harassment targets often use multiple tactics to manage their experiences with previous studies indicating they most avoid or ignore their perpetrators (Magley, 2002). More broadly, harassment targets may use cognitive responses that are generally internally focused and attempt to manage their own emotions and/or they may use behavioral strategies that are generally problem-focused. In Magley’s (2002) coping conceptualization, which is the basis of our coding schema, cognitive and behavioral responses could also involve either engagement or disengagement, similar to an approach – avoidance preference.

This bi-dimensional coping model reflects both the cognitive – behavioral distinction, which along with an engagement – disengagement dimension, is a well-validated and useful framework for considering survivors’ responses (Magley, 2002). Responses that represent engagement are intended to manage the situation itself whereas disengagement is intended to allow the survivor to avoid the perpetrator or situation. This typology results in the four strategies of cognitive engagement (including self-blame, relabeling and appeasement), behavioral engagement (including assertion and reporting), cognitive disengagement (including detachment, denial and endurance) and behavioral disengagement (including avoidance and seeking social support).

In the absence of any existing empirical data indicating that the nature of Twitter users’ harassment or assault experiences differ from other survivors’ experiences, we expected
that any coping described in #MeToo tweets would parallel the most common coping responses found in the general population (i.e. cognitive engagement and disengagement strategies). Most studies of workplace harassment indicate that targets tend to avoid and ignore the situation more often than responding assertively, although the latter may be necessitated over time if the harassment progresses (Cortina et al., 2002; Magley, 2002). Studies of sexual assault also indicate that reporting and seeking formal support are infrequent coping responses (Pelson and Paré, 2005; Holland and Cortina, 2017). Less is known about coping with assault or harassment incidents in settings outside work, school or campus contexts (e.g. one’s home or anonymous street harassment).

Targets’ reluctance to take assertive action is often based on concerns about retaliation or skepticism about being taken seriously (Cortina and Magley, 2003). A study of university faculty compared self-reported coping strategies and respondents’ ideal coping strategies and indicated that faculty generally wished they had been more assertive but reported contextual and situational constraints that prevented them from doing so (Salin et al., 2014). This is understandable given the critical role of organizational constraints on targets’ responses (e.g. tenure concerns, unclear policies). We expect similar results outside of the workplace too, as situational and contextual constraints are critical there too, and variables such as a target’s age, the power dynamics inherent in the situation, and time issues (e.g. catcalls on the street) may prevent targets from responding assertively.

Coping does not take place in an isolated environment; rather, survivors interact with family members, friends, coworkers and in some cases, therapists, to either address or avoid their experiences. This social dynamic is reflected on social media platforms as well. In the case of #MeToo, Twitter users could post personal stories or simply react to others’ stories. During face-to-face interactions, assault survivors encounter a range of positive social support (e.g. validation) and negative support (e.g. victim blaming) upon disclosing to others and these reactions are linked to survivors’ posttraumatic stress symptoms and subsequent adaptive or maladaptive coping (Ullman, 2000). Online platforms offer opportunities for users to anonymously post antagonistic, hateful or harassing comments with little consequence (Fox et al., 2015) and, to the extent that survivors see these responses to their disclosures, the negative social reactions may prompt posttraumatic stress or self-blame (Orchowski et al., 2013).

It is critical to examine both positive and negative social reactions to #MeToo that survivors contended with upon disclosing their stories. Although the nature of our data does not allow for an examination of how survivors subsequently coped with online reactions they received, it is important to describe the range of social reactions encountered by those who disclosed as part of the #MeToo movement. This can be useful in providing a realistic description for support providers who may need to address the backlash survivors encounter online. Social media interactions represent a component of survivors’ support networks and they may play a critical in understanding how coping is either facilitated or thwarted (Ullman and Relyea, 2016).

**Current study**
We had multiple goals related to our analysis of #MeToo tweets. We focused on both the content and sentiment of tweets to describe the tone of survivors’ disclosures and of non-targets’ social reactions. Sentiment analysis can be viewed as a complement to human-based assessment in examining social media responses. An evaluation of sentiment alone can be limited in that it provides a one-dimensional assessment relying on positive, negative or neutral valence of text with no context (Gaspar et al., 2016). Our evaluation and coding of other aspects of tweets, including context and content of incidents, provides additional critical details regarding the overall nature of #MeToo disclosures and reactions.

We focus here on a sample of tweets from the 24 h period immediately after the first #MeToo post. To examine the nature of disclosures and social reactions, we
categorized the content of tweets and analyzed sentiment via lexicon systems (i.e. word books and vocabulary lists). We expected the sentiment of the tweets to be relatively negative in tone given the nature of harassment and assault incidents. This led to the following hypothesis:

**H1.** The mean level of sentiment across all tweets will be negative.

Related to sentiment, we next focused on the subset of tweets where survivors disclosed personal experiences and we coded the type of harassment or assault described (i.e. gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, stalking or assault with penetration). This allowed for a descriptive accounting of #MeToo disclosures and led to the following research question to link incident type to sentiment:

**RQ1.** Does the average sentiment level of tweets differ depending on the type of incident described in the disclosure (i.e. type of harassment or assault)?

Finally, we focused on all disclosure tweets that included descriptions of coping. We coded these based on Magley’s (2002) typology and then assessed links between incidents, sentiment, and coping strategies. This led to the following research questions:

**RQ2.** Are there significant differences in use of coping strategies based on the context or type of incident?

**RQ3.** Are there significant differences in sentiment based on coping strategy?

Addressing these questions through content, context, and sentiment coding in various subsets of a large sample of #MeToo tweets will contribute to sensemaking of the initial tweets that started this social activism movement.

**Methods and data**

We began by gathering #MeToo tweets using the Meltwater Outside Insight social media analytics application (Meltwater: Outside Insight, 2018) from the 24 h following the tweet from Alyssa Milano on October 15, 2017 at 1:21 p.m. GST. We chose this period given the massive quantity of information that was tweeted within ten days after the movement began (Park, 2017); 24 h would allow us to study the initiation of the movement on Twitter. Using filters to access only English-language tweets that we could subsequently code, with #MeToo as a keyword and searching for original posts that did not include retweets (i.e. non-original content), we accessed 130,000 tweets. To reduce our data to a limit of 10,000 tweets that our software programs could manage, we selected the initial 10,000 tweets from the 130,000 tweets, all of which were posted on October 15. By collecting tweets from the earliest moments of the use of the hashtag, we were more likely to obtain samples that were legitimate responses to Milano’s prompt, rather than meta-commentary about the volume of resulting tweets.

**Data cleaning and sample characteristics**

Using the sample of 10,000 tweets, we next eliminated irrelevant and duplicate tweets. Tweets that were deemed irrelevant fell into five categories: irrelevant content (e.g. “My daughter told me, ‘I want to buy everything in this store’ #MeToo”); political content with no direct commentary (e.g. “Unearthed footage shows Donald Trump kissing and squeezing a woman while offering a job [...] #MeToo”); links to a product (e.g. “Check out this Amazon deal: Creative Calm Studios [...] #MeToo”); commenting on the #MeToo trend (e.g. “#MeToo is now trending in #NY”); and literary quotes (e.g. “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you. Maya Angelou #MeToo”). After the removal of these tweets and duplicate tweets, the final data set included 7,634 original tweets.
Sentiment coding
Using the sentiment extraction package for R (Jockers, 2015), we analyzed the 7,634 tweets using three sentiment libraries: the AFINN sentiment lexicon, the Bing opinion-mining lexicon, and the Syuzhet dictionary. The AFINN sentiment lexicon contains 2,477 English words and scores them using a scale ranging from −5 (negative sentiment) to +5 (positive sentiment). The lexicon was developed between 2009 and 2011 to account for internet slang and obscenities not included in other lexicons (Nielsen, 2011). The Bing opinion-mining lexicon contains 6,789 words and scores them only according to positive or negative valence, ranging from −5 to 5 (Hu and Liu, 2004; Liu et al., 2005). The Syuzhet lexicon is a sentiment dictionary containing 10,748 words scored on a continuous scale ranging from −1 to +1 (Jockers, 2015). To accommodate for variations in word lists and valence scoring, we used the overall valence score for each lexicon’s coding and formed a mean score across the three measures. For overall sentiment, coefficient α reliability was 0.86, within an acceptable amount of agreement based on three items.

Content coding of social reactions
Next, from the set of 7,634 tweets we randomly selected 2,102 tweets to allow for manageable individual-level coding of disclosures and social reactions (referred to herein as the “individually-coded subsample”). By using simple random selection, this provided a sample of tweets posted at various times on October 15, 2017. Two raters then coded the 2,102 tweets either as representing: a personal disclosure or, for non-disclosure tweets; a positive social reaction (subcategories described below); or a negative social reaction (subcategories described below). Initial agreement among raters using these three categories was 0.92, followed by eventual resolution of conflicting codes.

For the positive social reaction categories, we used Bogen et al.’s (2019) five social themes. These included bystander intervention (i.e. inserting oneself into a thread of replies to call out others’ unsupportive responses to survivors’ disclosures), emotional support (i.e. expressing gratitude to those who disclosed their stories, extending offers to talk or provide other support), validation and belief (i.e. reassuring the survivors that they are believed and supported), tangible aid (i.e. suggesting resources for survivors) and advocacy (i.e. expressing an intent or desire to mobilize societal change). Other social reactions could be defined as negative; namely, distraction (i.e. directing attention away from survivors; discussing political issues) and egoism (i.e. non-targets highlighting their own emotions and reactions to #MeToo). For this study, we also added a third negative emotion category to represent backlash (i.e. disbelief of survivors or vitriolic criticism of the #MeToo movement). Sample tweets for each of these social reaction categories are shown in Table I.

Content and context coding of personal disclosures
Two raters analyzed the subset of tweets that contained personal disclosures of harassment or assault (n = 912). To code the incident content, we created categories based on Fitzgerald et al.’s (1999) definitions of three types of sexual harassment: gender harassment (including sexist comments and catcalls), unwanted sexual attention (including touching and unwanted requests for dates) and sexual coercion (including threats and stalking). We added a separate category for sexual assault that included penetration; this category was differentiated from the sexual coercion category in that sexual coercion focused solely on threats, stalking, and verbal pressure for sexual contact without physical assault or penetration. Finally, we used a fifth category to capture tweets that indirectly referenced a target’s harassment or assault but did not provide enough details to code the type of content (no information). Table II includes sample tweets from these five categories.

Raters also coded any setting or context information provided in the 912 disclosure tweets. We used seven categories to describe context: work, school, home, street, date
settings, family/friend relationships and other (unspecified setting). We recorded whether survivors indicated their age at the time of the incident, whether they named a perpetrator (coded dichotomously), and any self-reported coping strategies (see below). For both the incident type and the context coding, raters' initial agreement was 0.94 and both sets of ratings then reached convergence after discussion of conflicting codes.

Content coding of coping responses
We assessed the coping details provided in the 912 disclosure tweets by referencing Magley’s (2002) description of behavioral engagement, behavioral disengagement, cognitive engagement and cognitive disengagement. Through multidimensional scaling, clustering and confirmatory factor analysis, Magley identified the behavioral engagement strategy as consisting of assertion and reporting to authorities, behavioral disengagement as consisting of avoidance and seeking social support, cognitive engagement as consisting of self-blame, relabeling and appeasement of the perpetrator, and cognitive disengagement as consisting of detachment, denial and endurance. We created subscale scores based on these four categories. Survivors infrequently mentioned more than one coping response in their tweets,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social reaction</th>
<th>Content category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sample tweets (n = 2,102)</th>
<th>Sample (%)</th>
<th>M (SD) sentiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive social reactions</td>
<td>Bystander response</td>
<td>Call out others' unsupportive responses to targets' tweets</td>
<td>“Hey men on Twitter, it is never a good time to make a joke about Harvey Weinstein. Just keep your mouth shut” “Victims of assault have reasons for not speaking up” “To anyone posting the #MeToo tag, please know that I have your back. Here to talk or listen or whatever else you need. I got you” “You are not alone with this, even when it feels like it”</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>−0.61 (2.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>Express gratitude and offers of support to targets</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.57 (2.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validation/ Belief</td>
<td>Reassurance that target is believed</td>
<td>“To all those tweeting #MeToo, thank you for your vulnerability and your bravery. I see you. I support you. I believe you”</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0.28 (2.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tangible information</td>
<td>Provide information or resources for targets</td>
<td>“Passing out is not consent” “Sexual harassment and assault have to do with power and control”</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>−1.73 (2.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Express individual or societal intent to change the culture</td>
<td>“I will work to make the world a better place so there’s no more #MeToo” “If we all stand together we can create meaningful change”</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>−1.23 (2.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative social reactions</td>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>Direct attention away from targets; discuss political issues related to violence</td>
<td>“It is hard enough enduring sexual harassment/assault. Having a sexual predator in the WH only adds salt to the wound” “Immigration agents want to erase years of assault in detention centers” “#MeToo is just making me angry so I’m gonna go to bed” “Women are bravely telling their stories and it makes me incredibly sad” “This #MeToo is dumb. It paints all men as sexual predators” “Nobody cares lol”</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>−1.36 (2.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egoism</td>
<td>Highlight own emotions and reactions to #MeToo</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>−0.71 (2.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Backlash/ Disbelief</td>
<td>Cynicism or backlash against targets</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>−1.55 (2.34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Social reaction tweets: reaction types, sample tweets and mean sentiment
possibly due to the 140 character limitation of Twitter, but we coded the first coping response described if there was more than one.

In our analyses below, we begin with the sample of 7,634 tweets and report the means and standard deviations of sentiment across all tweets. We then focus on the individually coded sample of 2,102 tweets and report the percentages of tweets that included personal disclosures vs those that were social reactions to others' tweets or the #MeToo movement. We then used the subsample of 912 disclosure tweets and report the percentages, means and standard deviations of sentiment based on type of incident described, along with an ANOVA to examine the significance of sentiment differences by type of incident. Finally, we examined the subsample of disclosure tweets that included coping details and used $\chi^2$ tests to examine differences in use of coping strategies based on context and incident type, as well as a $t$-test to determine if there were significant differences in sentiment based on whether coping details were provided in the tweet or not.

Results
We first extracted sentiment and contextual information from the #MeToo tweets. Using our aggregate measure of sentiment, the 7,634 tweets had a slightly negative tone ($M = -0.49, SD = 3.61$) and generally indicated anger and sadness (empathy for survivors) as opposed to disbelief or skepticism. The subset of 2,102 individually coded tweets also had slightly negative sentiment ($M = -0.59, SD = 2.47$), and was not significantly different from the larger data set.

Content of tweets: disclosures and social reactions
Using the subset of 2,102 randomly selected tweets that were manually coded for content, we examined social reactions in greater detail. As shown in Table I, there was a relatively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assault or harassment category</th>
<th>Sample tweets with incident type information ($n = 912$)</th>
<th>% of all incidents described</th>
<th>$M$ (SD) sentiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender harassment/sexist comments/catcalls</td>
<td>“I was told I had no place as a music major because a woman’s place is in the home” “Street harassment is a huge part of my anxiety. It happens every time I leave the house no matter what I wear. I don’t go out much”</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>-0.47 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted sexual attention/touching</td>
<td>“Inappropriately touched multiple times while working as a nurse. Sadly very common in the healthcare industry” “Flashed by a middle-aged man while playing out by my house with my best friend when we were 9”</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>-0.33 (1.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault/penetration</td>
<td>“I was sexually assaulted by a man at (organization) who pretended to work there” “At age 22 my partner at the time taught me that not all rape is violent”</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>-1.86 (1.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking/threats/coercion</td>
<td>“Had an angel investor offer mentorship in exchange for sex, which I less-than-politely declined; was told I would never be successful” “Boss said he wanted to bash my head in, female coworker said that’s just his management style”</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>-1.09 (2.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No harassment type information provided</td>
<td>“My perpetrator was family – and then he was honored in public” “It just seemed like something I had to accept working in the restaurant business”</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>-0.09 (2.19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Disclosure tweets: assault and harassment types, sample tweets and mean sentiment
even distribution of tweets that disclosed personal harassment or assault (43.4 percent) and tweets that did not recount personal stories but instead relayed a positive social reaction (42.4 percent), with fewer tweets displaying negative social reactions (14.2 percent).

Table I also shows percentages of coded tweets for the five subcategories of positive social reactions (i.e. bystander response, emotional support, validation, tangible information and advocacy), the three subcategories of negative social reactions (i.e. distraction, egoism and backlash/disbelief), along with sentiment means and standard deviations. The most common types of positive social reactions were validation and belief of the original #MeToo tweet (12.5 percent of all tweets) and tweets advocating for social change (12.2 percent). The most common type of negative social reaction was egoism (9.6 percent of all tweets).

Similar to Bogen et al.’s (2019) discussion of the valence of egoism (classified in their typology as a negative social reaction), the #MeToo egoistic tweets did not necessarily indicate disbelief of targets or dismissal of the movement but instead typically described sadness or anger in reading about others’ incidents; this is nevertheless reflected in the negative mean level of sentiment. A smaller percentage of tweets indicated backlash or disbelief regarding #MeToo (2.6 percent). With the exception of emotional support and validation/belief tweets, which both had a positive mean sentiment, all other categories had overall valence indicating negative sentiment.

**Context and coping details in disclosure tweets**

As noted above, of our individually coded sample, 912 tweets were disclosures (43.4 percent). Of these, 2.3 percent specifically named a harasser or an organization where the incident took place. In all, 9 percent indicated their age when the incident(s) took place ($M = 13.4$ years; $SD = 5.4$) but there were no significant correlations between age, type of incident, sentiment or coping response. Of the disclosure tweets, 57.8 percent gave information about the type of harassment or assault ($n = 527$). Table II provides percentages of these 527 tweets describing context details, along with mean sentiment levels. The most common type of incident disclosed was sexual assault with penetration (49.7 percent) followed by unwanted sexual attention not including penetration (32.6 percent), threats and stalking (9.7 percent), and gender harassment (8.0 percent). Regarding settings where the incidents took place, of the subset of 912 disclosure tweets, 52.4 percent gave setting/contextual information, with work as the most frequent setting (31.8 percent; shown in Table III, along with mean sentiment levels), followed by school (18.8 percent).

Regarding RQ1, the 912 disclosure tweets had a mean sentiment that was slightly negative in tone ($M = -0.71$, $SD = 2.21$, noted in Table I). This was not significantly different from the sample of all tweets, although we did find significant differences in sentiment based on incident type (reported in Table II), $F(4, 907) = 30.52, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.12$. Tweets describing assault with penetration had significantly more negative sentiment ($M = -1.86$, $SD = 1.94$) than those describing gender harassment ($M = -0.47$, $SD = 2.38$) or unwanted sexual attention ($M = -0.33$, $SD = 1.90$).

Using the subset of 912 disclosure tweets, we examined coping strategies of those who provided details ($n = 330$; 36.2 percent of the coded disclosure sample). The most commonly reported coping strategy was behavioral engagement (44.5 percent), followed by cognitive disengagement (22.4 percent) and behavioral disengagement (19.7 percent). The least frequent type of coping described was cognitive engagement (11.5 percent). This reflects a difference in descriptions of coping strategies from the disclosure tweets as compared with data from more targeted sources such as workplace surveys or clinical sample interviews. That is, in these data, both behavioral engagement and sexual assault/penetration were disclosed and described more frequently than in non-social media samples (Post et al., 2011).

To address RQ2, we conducted $\chi^2$ tests to explore potential differences in coping strategies based on context or type of incident. There were no significant differences in
coping strategies based on where the incident took place (e.g. work, school, home). Regarding the type of incident, there were no significant differences in the use of cognitive coping strategies, but there were significant differences in use of the behavioral strategies (both engagement and disengagement) for those who described unwanted sexual attention. Significantly more targets of unwanted sexual attention either provided no coping information (67.4 percent) or used behavioral engagement (22.1 percent) than no behavioral engagement (10.5 percent, \( \chi^2 (8) = 27.77, p = 0.001 \)). Significantly fewer targets of unwanted sexual attention described using behavioral disengagement (30.2 percent) or not describing a coping strategy (67.4 percent, \( \chi^2 (8) = 16.52, p = 0.04 \)).

Regarding relationships between coping and sentiment (RQ3), there were no significant differences in sentiment based on whether targets did or did not use each of the four coping approaches. There were significant differences though for those who reported coping details and those who did not. The tweets of those who did not provide any coping information (\( n = 582 \)) had less negative sentiment (\( M = -0.60, SD = 2.18 \)) than those who described their coping (\( M = -0.95, SD = 2.33 \), \( t (910) = 2.28, p < 0.05 \), regardless of the type of coping used.

**Discussion**

Our examination of #MeToo tweets allowed for a description of types of experiences, self-reported coping and others’ social reactions. The most commonly disclosed experiences involved unwanted sexual attention or sexual assault, the latter of which is less commonly reported in survey samples with more general populations (i.e. around 20 percent prevalence; Post et al., 2011). Most incidents took place at work or school. Overall, the average tone of the entire sample of tweets (\( n = 7,634 \)) displayed slightly negative sentiment, appearing to reflect the types of words survivors used in their descriptions of harassment and assault incidents, as well as their outrage against perpetrators. The few negative social

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context category</th>
<th>Sample tweets with context information (( n = 478 ))</th>
<th>% of context</th>
<th>M (SD) sentiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>“Early 20s, coworker called me and said his marriage was on the rocks, he liked me, always giving me elevator eyes. Manager intervened” “2 days ago my manager watched a customer grab me. Manager said sometimes it’s best not to say anything. Looking for a new job now”</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>-0.23 (1.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>“High school teacher came onto me and molested girls on the swim team” “I was assaulted twice in grad school”</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>-0.48 (2.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>“Molested by a male babysitter at the age of 6” “New apartment neighbor, seemingly friendly older man from Guam, thought hug was cultural greeting but got tongue thrust instead”</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>-0.69 (2.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>“No one on the train helped me. I ran off as soon as I could and found a cop because the man was still nearby” “Leaving a club in London with a friend, bunch of guys blocked our way down the stairs. ‘You can pass if you kiss us’”</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>-0.68 (2.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/ partner</td>
<td>“I met a guy on Tinder and we were a thing before all this happened. He was manipulative in more ways than one and hurt me badly” “My ex-boyfriend physically overpowered me on a few occasions”</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>-1.29 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend/ family</td>
<td>“Step-grandfather exposed himself to me at age 4” “Last week a fellow cyclist friend threatened to kiss me once we got down the mountain. I told him no way and cycled down by myself” “One of my earliest childhood memories is of the time the daycare workers took me to the church sanctuary and molested me” “At a very fancy spa”</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>-0.26 (1.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.24 (3.08)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Situation/context of assault or harassment, sample tweets and mean sentiment
reactions were mainly instances of egoistic tweets that drew attention away from survivors’ stories to the commenter’s personal emotions (often anger or sadness).

The generally positive nature of social reactions in the #MeToo tweets is reassuring given that we noted some survivors who disclosed their stories indicated they were sharing them for the first time. Many of them wrote about the anxiety they felt upon disclosing or how their friends or family would be surprised to hear that they were targeted. They appear to have received mainly positive emotional support and validation from their online audience. We used varied approaches to examine the content of tweets given that overall, our sentiment analysis displayed a slightly negative tone, but the social reactions to targets were largely supportive. Valences of written expressions do not necessarily translate literally and this was a challenge in our research. Positive expressions might indicate that humor or sarcasm and, likewise, negative affect may serve a function that is not inherently negative if it motivates individuals to implement change (Gaspar et al., 2016).

We note that power, assault, harassment, context, and coping issues are interconnected but an examination of their interactions was not possible with our data as survivors’ disclosures were limited in details. This was most likely due to Twitter’s character limit but could have also been based on survivors’ progress on a continuum of recovery from the incident. Based on this, we believe there are many avenues to expand upon in future studies related to the content of traumatic incidents described in tweets. For example, we noted that a (relatively) small number of tweets in our sample describing workplace and street harassment relayed incidents of cyberbullying and online threats. We did not code these tweets in any more detail than simple context and content categories, but we suggest that future research should explore potential links between targets’ experiences with anonymous online personal threats and stalking or workplace harassment. As D’Cruz and Noronha (2017) noted, research on workplace cyberbullying has generally attended only to online incidents in traditional workplaces where coworkers also interact face-to-face. It is critical to expand conceptualizations of workplace abuse to include freelance or telecommuting workers, for example.

Regarding limitations of our study, although we focused on Twitter as it was the platform for Milano’s initial #MeToo tweet, the movement quickly expanded to other platforms and there are disclosures and social reactions to be found there too. We noted anecdotally that some users indicated that they were tweeting their #MeToo incidents because they did not feel comfortable posting disclosures within a Facebook friend group. This highlights social media users’ differential management of their various online accounts, along with potential differences in sharing trauma with Facebook friends or Twitter followers. Choi and Bazarova (2015) described the importance of imagined audiences across platforms and noted differences in types and frequencies of general self-disclosures on Facebook and Twitter, with the latter employing looser-defined boundaries implying less control over information. It is not clear yet how this may influence disclosure of various types of trauma as seen in online social activism.

We also emphasize that access to Twitter as an outlet to disclose one’s personal experiences, or even to indicate one’s support related to #MeToo, depends upon an individual’s access to technology. As a result, we are certain that the experiences gathered from our sample of tweets are somewhat limited in reach – although we did note that a few tweets described assault or harassment incidents relayed second-hand from elderly mothers or grandmothers. Specific to social activism, those who have participated in previous online protests were more highly educated and more interested in politics than those who participated in physical protests (van Laer and van Aelst, 2010). Relatedly, for ease of analyses, we gathered only English-language tweets, which may limit generalizability to the extent that harassment and assault experiences and social reactions are culturally dependent. #MeToo began in the USA, the initial tweet was written in English, and the majority of tweets were also in English, but 29 percent of tweets during a sample of
high-volume periods were written in another language (Anderson and Toor, 2018). A global sample of tweets could be examined in more detail using translation methodology.

A related issue that will arise with expanded samples of tweets highlights difficulties with sentiment interpretation. Although sentiment scoring and opinion mining can rapidly process and score large data sets with reasonably reliable results, the process can be limited by context-dependent keywords (e.g. “small,” which can be positive or negative depending on the context; Ding et al., 2008). These limitations related to context and even sarcasm are important to note and will arise with cross-cultural interpretations. In our English-only sample of tweets, we attempted to minimize the misinterpretation of sentiment with our additional use of individual coders who evaluated the content and context categories and provided a varied perspective.

Our study provides unique insights related to coping with assault and harassment given that the wide reach of social media platforms allows users to disclose, react to others’ experiences, and gain information about resources and coping strategies. Regarding coping, we emphasize the possible need to reframe existing coping typologies to include online interactions as a cognitive engagement strategy. Existing typologies frame cognitive engagement responses as relatively negative (e.g. self-blame, appeasement) but survivors of trauma who interact online as part of a global activist movement could experience epiphanies about societal or structural sexism allowing them to make external attributions that might be helpful[3]. In addition, our results indicated behavioral engagement as the most frequently described coping approach in the #MeToo tweets, although it is typically less commonly found in survey samples. This may be due to the broader context of incidents described in tweets (not restricted to the workplace), a wider range of behavioral content (including stalking and street harassment), or a difference in Twitter users’ backgrounds and ages compared with working adult samples. We also note that the most commonly disclosed experience was sexual assault and this likely impacted the type(s) of coping strategies used among those who disclosed.

As Cavazos-Rehg et al. (2016) noted with regard to depression, the extent to which online disclosure helps individuals process their experiences is still unknown. We view this study as an initial examination of the use of #MeToo in disclosing harassment and assault; subsequent studies will contrast social media use to more traditional venues for disclosure. Regarding the development of #MeToo over time, we will also longitudinally examine if social reactions or backlash have changed and if new themes emerge in disclosure tweets. Finally, we also view as necessary an examination of the effectiveness of online disclosures from survivors’ perspectives, along with the efficacy of attempts to share recovery resources online.

It is fascinating to consider the emergence of social media platforms as outlets for disclosure and social support; they have opened new frontiers in coping opportunities. Our analyses of #MeToo tweets adds to the literature on how survivors cope with harassment and assault via sensemaking (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010) and we are hopeful that, at least for those who choose to disclose personal incidents, online platforms can serve as one source of support.

Notes

1. In comparison, #BlackLivesMatter, another US-based social activism hashtag, was tweeted an average of 17,000 times per day from 2013 through May 2018 (Anderson et al., 2018).
2. Twitter allows users to post original content or photographs, retweet others’ content and follow or subscribe to other users’ accounts. This is similar to Facebook, which is another social media platform not examined in the current study. In contrast to Twitter, Facebook does not enforce a character limitation. Both Twitter and Facebook are options for users to spread information regarding social activism and allow for social connections and conversations with other users.
3. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion regarding the expansion of existing coping frameworks.
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From Anita Hill to Christine Blasey Ford: a reflection on lessons learned

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to offer a critical reflection on congressional testimony in the #MeToo era from the standpoint of a millennial graduate student.

Design/methodology/approach – This essay is based on observational data from a roundtable discussion between Anita Hill and Kimberlé Crenshaw moderated by Dr Dorothy Roberts and connects to themes in research on sex-based harassment.

Findings – The findings of this essay suggest there is still much work to be done in operationalizing intersectionally in the #Metoo era.

Originality/value – The thoughts and opinions expressed in this essay are the author’s own.

Keywords Feminism, Racial discrimination, Sexual discrimination, Anita Hill, Christine Blasey Ford

Paper type Viewpoint

Introductory remarks

On October 11, 1991, Anita Hill, a young black Lawyer, sat alone in front of the looming all-male, all White Senate Judiciary Committee to tell her story of how the US Supreme Court nominee under question sexually harassed her when she worked for him under the Education Department and at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). I was only a toddler when she testified but had grown up hearing bits and pieces about what had happened to her on that day. I knew, for instance, that a soda can was involved, that she wore a light blue suit, and that her harasser was now a Supreme Court justice. Twenty-seven years later, another woman, this time an older white woman, sat in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee and testified about her alleged sexual assault by another male US Supreme Court nominee.

Much has been made of the similarities between Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford’s testimonies almost three decades apart (Bouchard and Schwartz-Taylor, 2018; Svokos, 2018). Both women are professors with advanced degrees. Both contacted the committee in confidence, not wanting their identity revealed. Both had to witness categorical denials of their testimony by their abuser. Both wore blue suits. As for the differences? Many political pundits have noted a shift in public perception around sexual harassment in favor of Ford, a concept that was beginning to forge into the public lexicon in the early 1990s, in part through Hill’s testimony. The composition of the Senate Judiciary Committee has changed since Hill testified in front of 14 white male senators. There are now four women and three people of color on the committee. The nature of their allegations was also different. Hill experienced repetitive sexual advances by Clarence Thomas in her professional life. Ford alleged that Brett Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her as a teenager at a house party decades prior. Racism and whiteness played important roles, too. Hill was the target of vulgar misogynoir, accused of making it all up and misunderstanding private courting rituals among African–Americans. Ford was largely relieved of racial dog-whistling and her pain was publicly witnessed and validated, but that did not stop her and her family from experiencing harassment, death threats, forced relocation and public speculation about her motives. The difference in the committees’ confirmation votes for Thomas and Kavanaugh...
is also important. In 1991, only one democratic senator on the committee voted against Thomas’s confirmation, whereas in 2018, Kavanaugh’s confirmation vote split down party lines with 11 Republicans voting affirmatively and 10 Democrats opposing his confirmation. Even though the split in the Kavanaugh vote was a significant outcome in the #MeToo era, both Hill and Ford were ultimately not believed and their abusers ascended to the untouchable top of the US Judicial system.

With the rallying cry of #MeToo to believe women, Dr Ford’s testimony was, in many ways, a litmus test for the movement which has seen success in taking down powerful men accused of sexual harassment predominantly in entertainment and media industries. Given that the Supreme Court is the highest court in the USA and the final arbiter of the law, Dr Ford’s allegations against Brett Kavanaugh held tremendous weight over the legitimacy of his appointment. The Supreme Court sits at the top of the judicial branch and is composed of nine justices appointed for life and sworn to ensure the promise of equal justice under law. Considering that no Supreme Court justice has ever been impeached from the bench, the confirmation of Thomas and Kavanaugh demonstrates the power and legacy of Supreme Court justices. The decisions they make and have made will affect the country for decades to come.

Although some may understand Kavanaugh’s confirmation as a sign of the limits of #MeToo, I wondered more, especially as someone who came of age during this time, what really has and has not changed from Hill to Ford. Fortunately, in October of 2018, I was lucky enough to attend a public roundtable discussion, “Sexual Harassment from Congressional Testimony to the #MeToo Movement,” on this very question sponsored by the Alice Paul Center at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The Alice Paul Center had previously hosted Hill 28 years earlier for her first public speaking engagement after Judge Thomas was confirmed to the Supreme Court. The 2018 roundtable featured a conversation between Dr Anita Hill, now a renowned Legal Scholar and Professor, and Dr Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Lawyer and Leading Scholar of critical race and feminist theory who served as a member of Hill’s support team in 1991. Crenshaw is best known for developing intersectionality theory, a theoretical framework which demonstrates the interlocking nature of multiple forms of power in lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). The framework has transformed social justice theory and practice. The roundtable was moderated by Dr Dorothy Roberts, a distinguished black feminist legal scholar who is known for her work on reproductive health and child welfare (e.g. Roberts, 1997). The event was planned prior to Senator Diane Feinstein’s revelations to the committee about Ford’s allegations and happened to fall two weeks after Ford’s testimony. The evening’s dialogue underscored the complexity of issues raised by both testimonies and exposed the intricate power geometries (Massey, 1993), including race, gender, and sexuality that have and continue to shape the US Supreme Court judicial confirmation process. Figure 1 provides a timeline from the publication of Crenshaw’s seminar work on intersectionality to the October 2018 roundtable discussion at the Alice Paul Center, around which this essay is centered.

A roundtable discussion: teachable moments
The event began with Roberts asking Hill and Crenshaw to reflect on what was similar and what has changed in the last two decades about the confirmation process. Hill began by reflecting on her most recent op-ed, published on September 18, 2018, in The New York Times five days before Ford was called to testify. In her op-ed Hill asked a crucial question: what would a fair process for Ford look like? Noting that three of the same senators still served on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Hill argued that the integrity of the court hung in the balance (Hill, 2018). Would the Senate Judiciary Committee take seriously sexual violence as a matter of public interest? Would there be a fair investigation, one led by a neutral investigative body, informed by experts in the field, where all possible witnesses are interviewed? Hill maintained
that the excuses by white male senators on the 1991 committee, under the foil of “not getting it,” would not suffice today. “It” being sexual abuse, in which there is ample empirical evidence and rigorous research on the prevalence and harm of sexual violence in the workplace. Given that the roundtable discussion was held two weeks after Ford’s testimony, the panelists were ready to answer the questions posed in Hill’s op-ed.

So, was there a fair investigation? Hill’s op-ed defined a fair investigation as one in which the integrity of the Supreme Court is understood to be at stake. A fair process would start with a committee protocol for vetting sexual harassment and assault claims; a protocol which senators have not managed to produce in the 27 years since Hill testified. Second, Hill advised the Senate Judiciary Committee to refrain from pitting the public interest in assessing claims of sexual harassment against the need for a fair confirmation hearing – two wholly compatible interests. Third, Hill recommended that there should be a neutral investigative body, made up of those with professional experience in sexual misconduct cases who will present its findings to the committee. These findings, along with counsel from experts in the field of sexual misconduct, should frame and guide the senator’s questions, not politics or myths about sexual assault. Fourth, the hearings should not be rushed, assault charges should be treated seriously, and enough time should be given for meaningful inquiry. Finally, Hill requested that Ford be treated with dignity and respect, to be referred to by her name, and not as “Judge Kavanaugh’s accuser” (Hill, 2018).

During Ford’s hearing, Hill’s advice on what a fair process would look like was systematically ignored. There was no protocol in place for vetting sexual abuse claims nor was there a neutral investigative body of experts advising the Senate Judiciary Committee on how best to evaluate the allegations. Ford’s testimony, and later Judge Kavanaugh’s explosive defense, made it abundantly clear that the senators serving on the committee, especially those that had served when Hill had testified, were not overly concerned with the integrity of the Supreme Court, but rather with image and optics. Crenshaw, who advised Hill in 1991, reminded the roundtable audience that when Hill testified the Senate Judiciary Committee did not take time to give the FBI investigation a fair process. Instead it was rushed, and key witnesses were not interviewed. Similarly, Ford asked for an investigation from the FBI before she testified but was only granted one after Senator Jeff Flake was publicly cornered in an elevator by survivors of sexual assault. The FBI’s investigation concerning Ford’s allegations was given a strict one-week timeline and priority was placed...
on getting Judge Kavanaugh’s confirmation vote out to the Senate floor. In both cases, attempts to ensure a fair process were thwarted by political timelines and limited scopes.

As it concerns the Senate Judiciary Committee, what changed from Hill to Ford were the optics. Hill testified in a massive room, seated alone in front of a public audience before the 14 senators on the Committee. Ford’s testimony took place in a smaller room and she was allowed to sit with her legal team with her family behind her. Perhaps the most sinister change was the use of Rachel Mitchell, a sex crimes prosecutor, to handle questioning of Ford by the Republican, all-male senators. Given that Dr Ford was not on trial – that she was bringing information forward about the appropriateness of a Supreme Court Justice nominee – the use of a prosecutor was questionable at best. As Crenshaw made this point, I thought about recent comments, including one by Vice President Mike Pence, that the #MeToo moment has gone so far that men are afraid to be in the same room as women (Tolentino, 2017). I was equally stunned on the eve of Ford’s testimony when a well-known male morning host on NPR’s Morning Edition failed to take seriously several women guests, including Senator Mazie Hirono, about Mitchell’s real purpose. The host was adamant that Mitchell was an “unbiased” interviewer and fought to understand his guest’s argument that the prosecutor was being used by Republican Senators who did not want to be caught saying anything unsavory in such a heightened political moment. In other words, holding the hearing in a smaller room, allowing Ford to be surrounded by her legal team and hiring Mitchell was about how to make the process look fair. So, while no one accused Ford of being possessed and demonic as Senator Orin Hatch famously accused Hill, Crenshaw reminded us that we must be cautious in evaluating the Committee’s improvements on how they treat those testifying on accusations of sexual harassment and abuse.

Whereas many commentators were ready to buy the ruse that the process to address sexual harassment allegations of nominees has improved since Hill testified, the roundtable discussion focused on the actual changes to workplaces and proliferation of workplace protection policies ushered in part through Hill’s testimony. Crenshaw argued that we need to understand and situate Hill’s testimony as a landmark moment in changing workplaces. Women, who saw their experiences reflected in Hill, sought legal redress. Within two years of Hill’s testimony, the number of sexual harassment charges filed with the EEOC had more than doubled. Additionally, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (amending the 1964 CRA) was passed to better empower employees in discrimination cases. Although it may be too early to quantify the effects, the EEOC (eeoc.gov) is experiencing a similar rise in complaints after Ford’s testimony, and one clear effect of #MeToo has been a reevaluation of what is considered appropriate workplace behavior.

When Dr Roberts asked during the roundtable what has not changed from Hill to Ford, Crenshaw and Hill reflected on the entwined persistence of patriarchy and racism that does not go away with promulgating policies and practices that address workplace relations, as important as such policies and practices are. Crenshaw argued that we need to produce new understandings to facilitate this ongoing conversation. Watching Judge Kavanaugh’s explosive defense of himself after Ford’s testimony is case in point. Under oath, Kavanaugh repeatedly lied and demonstrated a lack of judicial temperament and directed inflammatory accusations toward committee members. Although many political commentators and politicians, including FOX news, President Trump and Senator Susan Collins, agreed that Ford was traumatized and had experienced harm, they casted doubt on the credibility of Ford’s testimony. What should we make of the fact that the harm Ford experienced is believed but not her conviction of who is responsible? Crenshaw’s response was simple: under patriarchy, men have discursive capital over women. That is, the experiences, feelings, thoughts and opinions of men are valued over those of women. Crenshaw cited Kate Manne’s recent work on himpathy, which describes the emotional dimensions of discursive inequality and explains how abusers get more empathy than their victims
(Manne, 2018). When Kelly Ann Conway said, “we see all our fathers, brothers, and sons in Kavanaugh” (Leah, 2018), or when consideration of how Kavanaugh’s family is faring took priority above and over the actual death threats, forced relocation and security measures Ford’s family had to take, empathy captures discursive inequality at work in real time. Thus, when attempting to understand what has not changed between Hill and Ford, Crenshaw demanded that we must be attentive to the dynamic and adaptive force of patriarchy. Crenshaw’s comment illuminates the role of optics discussed earlier. The perception that things have changed is key to how patriarchy, as a structuring force underlying the judicial nominee process, continues to go unaddressed.

As a person who had been too young to understand Anita Hill’s testimony when it occurred, I was most struck by Crenshaw and Hill’s reflections on the missed opportunity for anti-racists and feminists groups to come together to support Hill and produce an understanding of patriarchal domination as entwined with white-supremacist domination, what Crenshaw terms intersectionality. Both Crenshaw and Hill recalled their disappointment at a group of black women who had arrived at Hill’s testimony wearing T-shirts to support Judge Thomas. While Hill had been testifying, anti-racist activists supporting Thomas had advanced the myth that Hill simply misunderstood “ordinary courting rituals between black men and women. Thomas himself had echoed this sentiment when he claimed he was being attacked by a “high-tech lynching for uppity Blacks” a statement out of the ideological playbook of the conservative institution The Federalist Society (Senate Judiciary Committee, 1991). By evoking real racial violence, Thomas more than doubled his support from African–Americans. Crenshaw argued this statement was intentionally crafted to imply that sexual harassment is a white women’s issue and that black women who bring forth sexual abuse allegations are betraying the interests of African–American communities. Crenshaw’s point is key because the history of white women weaponizing rape claims to lynch black men (see, e.g., Emmett Till) is real and explains why Thomas’s statement resonated. However, it is important to remember that a black woman has never lynched a black man and that such a statement, as Crenshaw argued, “is inflammatory towards Black women because sexual harassment at work has been the condition of Black women’s rights from the minute they arrived on these shores” (Crenshaw et al., 2018). Under chattel slavery, the use and abuse of black women’s bodies, the status of property and the sexual terror inflicted at work – in the house, the fields and other industrial places – is the foundation upon which we should understand struggles against sexual abuse in this country (Crenshaw et al., 2018). Given this history, Crenshaw reminded us that the advertisement published on November 17, 1991 in The New York Times by African–American women in defense of themselves was a necessary way to push back against the implicit white washing of American History by publicly disavowing the token use of Thomas as a means to consolidate a conservative majority on the court and thwart the advancement of social justice initiatives.

When considering the failure of mainstream feminist groups to support Hill, I am skeptical of the argument that there was a dearth of adequate information or analysis to align feminist and anti-racist struggles. Two years before Hill testified, Crenshaw published her seminal paper, Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics (Crenshaw, 1989) in the University of Chicago Legal Forum, later followed by her 1991 article Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color in the Stanford Law Review, laying the groundwork for the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Although the term intersectionality has reached far beyond the academy today, at the time of publication and during Hill’s testimony, intersectionality did not figure as prominently in the public lexicon. However, there were existing frameworks that could have informed an anti-racist feminist coalition expressing the core principles of intersectionality: namely that
single axis understandings of power (i.e. race or gender) distort an accurate understanding of both sexism and racism and erase women of color whose lives are lived at the intersection of multiple forms of powerlessness (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Consider the Combahee River Collective (CRC), who issued a now infamous statement in 1977 describing their politics as black lesbian women, as “actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analyses and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee River Collective, 1983, p. 264). Formulating the term “identity politics” (which should be noted has since been co-opted by mainstream media to mean precisely the opposite of what the CRC intended) (Taylor, 2017), the CRC statement grounded the importance of understanding forms of domination as co-produced and the necessity of bringing together falsely separated struggles against oppression. Thus, it was entirely appropriate of Crenshaw, in the 2018 roundtable to diagnose the failure of anti-racist and feminist groups in 1991 to come together as a failure of intersectional thinking.

Given that some supporters of Thomas were vocal that Hill misunderstood private courting rituals, it has been disappointing for me to learn that mainstream, or perhaps more aptly white, feminists failed to adequately support Hill in 1991, especially considering the rallying cry of second-wave feminism of the 1960s, “the personal is political.” Crenshaw argued that feminist groups over represented the experiences and analyses of white women and that this led them to say things like, “we don’t see color,” or “race has nothing to do with this.” Downplaying race or seeing race as getting in the way of feminist goals perpetuates racist stereotypes that deny black women’s victimhood and contributes to the discursive inequality experienced by victims of sexual abuse, especially those who are not white. Decades of black feminist thought have emphasized how feminist thought and action is limited when white women center themselves in movements for gender justice precisely because privileged experiences are not adequate enough on their own to incite transformative change. Attending to the entwined production of multiple structures of power means that struggles against domination, in the workplace, in the home, and on the streets must privilege the multitudes of experiences, informed by one’s race, gender expression, sexual orientation, citizenship status, religious beliefs and ability. Nuanced analysis of sexual abuse is necessary in order to operationalize a power analysis adequate to yolk diverse experiences and inform radical change.

**Concluding thoughts: building coalitions against workplace harassment**

We can see the consequences of the failure to think with intersectionality in the present moment. Consider the origins of the #Metoo movement, started by Tarana Burke, a black woman working with youth to center the experiences of black girls and women who are victims of sexual assault. In 2017 surrounding the allegations against American film producer Harvey Weinstein, actress Alyssa Milano solicited tweets for the public to share their experiences of sexual abuse under the hashtag #MeToo (Cachero, 2018). While social media posts poured in under the hashtag demonstrating the ubiquity and pervasiveness of sexual harassment and abuse, many drew attention to the existence of Burke’s MeToo campaign. Burke’s MeToo campaign began in 2006 to raise awareness of sexual abuse and center practices of healing, an important piece of Burke’s activism that is commonly overlooked (Harris, 2018). Although Milano was unaware of Burke’s work and has since apologized, the failure of #MeToo to operationalize an intersectional framework means that the unique experiences and knowledge of women of color who are victims of sexual abuse is decentered and seen as additive; another set of stories to add to the cacophony of tweets describing sexual assault. One of the consequences, as Burke argues, is a narrow focus on condemning individuals who exhibit bad behavior at the expense of reckoning
with the structures of power and privilege that continue to thwart transformational change (Cachero, 2018).

Readers of this paper should know that I am a millennial American White woman pursuing a doctoral degree. Ford’s testimony and the #MeToo movement has had an enormous impact on me. I watched Ford’s testimony with tears streaming down my face as I saw myself reflected in her. I watched the archival footage of Hill’s testimony and felt rage at her treatment by elected representatives. I felt sorrow reading the slew of social media posts from friends, colleagues and family sharing their #MeToo stories. I am inspired by Hill, Ford and all others who have shared their stories and refuse to concede to sexual harassment and abuse as acceptable working conditions. The roundtable too has had a profound influence on me and has taught me to reject the optics of false progress, to tend to the rage that gender injustice inflames and to reckon with the privilege of seeing my experiences reflected in so many of the #MeToo stories being told.

It is this last point, the heightened media attention given to the stories of women whom I share similar privileges with, that sits uneasy in my spirit and inspires this essay. As Burke’s activism underscores, even under increased awareness around sexual abuse many black women and women of color in entertainment industries and elsewhere still do not come forward with their stories. When they do, they are often overlooked by the media, experience obstacles in seeking professional help and are not believed. Moreover, if their abuser is a man of color, many women report to Burke that they continue to feel they are faced with the impossible choice of protecting or harming the person who has violated them (Harris, 2018). After all these years the same false choice between gender and racial justice that thrust Hill into the national spotlight remains. This reminds me of work by The Girls Justice League, an action research collective of young women in the Philadelphia area conducting research on girls and female-identified youth and the systems that impact their daily lives (www.girlsjusticeleague.org). I worked with the Girls Justice League on their juvenile justice status project in 2015 and was struck by the perverseness of knowledge held by girls of color on how to avoid sexual abuse by police officers including never accepting a ride from a police officer and never talking to a police officer alone. These young girls have already learned a fundamental sexual assault survival lesson that girls who look like me most likely will not – to be weary of those in positions of power purporting to offer protection. To me, this reveals the necessity of leveraging the #MeToo moment to become intentional about centering the knowledge of those who experience racism, and other interlocking systems of oppression, in seeking gender equality. The need remains for organizations, movements and institutions to fight to center the experiences of the most marginalized in society. As scholars invested in adequately grasping modalities of power that perpetuate sexual harassment and discrimination it is important that we are attuned with real material struggles on the ground and that our analyses are sufficient enough to contribute to anti-racist feminist coalition building against domination in the diversity of spaces that constitute the workplace today.

References


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