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# Sexual Harassment in Organizational Context

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This study sheds light on the organizational foundations of sexual harassment. The authors evaluated a theoretical model underscoring the influence of worker power, workplace culture, and gender composition using unique data derived from the population of English-language, book-length workplace ethnographies. The authors used ordered and multinomial logistic regression to test whether organizational explanations vary in their capacity to predict three distinct forms of sexual harassment: patronizing, taunting, and predatory conduct. The findings reveal that organizational attributes influence not only the presence of workplace sexual harassment but also the specific form in which it manifests. The result is a more conceptually refined model of sexual harassment in organizational context. The authors conclude with a discussion of the contribution of this study to sociological explanations of sexual harassment, including linkages to more recent qualitative work underscoring its complexity, and with implications for policy in light of current workplace trends.

**Keywords:** *sexual harassment; organizations; physicality; gender role spillover; workplace culture*

I had a baggy skirt on one day and I went up the steps to the podium to where all the used car slips are and I was looking for a particular deal and my boss,

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the general manager, came out and he thought he was funny having a good time, and he took a camera and stuck it under my skirt. . . . I chased him into his office and I said, "What is that?" He had pulled the film out by then and I grabbed it. And I was mad. I put it in my purse and I remember telling them off and getting real mad at him, and he's laughing because he thought that was just the funniest thing. And then they pat you on the butt, like this.

—Lawson (2000, p. 49)

Researchers have long noted the role of organizational practices in constraining women's career-related outcomes, highlighting the consequences of gendered role expectations, the crowding of women into disadvantageous jobs, and discrimination in assessment protocols and career advancement (Acker, 1990; Bielby & Baron, 1986; England, 1992; Jacobs, 1992; Kanter, 1977; Martin & Collinson, 1999; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Yet the organizational antecedents of women's lived experiences on the job, such as sexual harassment, have received far less attention. Sexual harassment takes many forms—including derogatory sexist remarks, hostile environments (produced by sexually oriented objects, pictures, comments, and gestures), solicitation, touching, quid pro quo arrangements, and even forced sexual contact—with grave consequences for work life (Gruber, 1992; Welsh, 1999). Its victims report heightened mental and physical stress; diminished satisfaction with work, coworkers, and supervisors; more negative attitudes toward firms; lower productivity; and increased tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover (Crull, 1982; LaBand & Lentz, 1998).

The powerful role of context in social life implies the need for a theoretical perspective on sexual harassment that takes into account its organizational foundations. Although individuals act out sexual harassment, they do so within the context of organizations, which have been assigned a shared burden of responsibility not only by social scientists but also by victims and courts of law (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Gruber, 1992; Welsh, 1999). Social scientists have posited a number of organizational explanations to explain sexual harassment, often evaluating them with organization-specific survey data (see Welsh, 1999, for a comprehensive review of this literature). However, data limitations inherent in studies of single organizations have largely precluded systematic investigation into the relative effects of different aspects of organizational context (for an exception, see Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber, 1993).

We offer a theoretical model incorporating themes associated with worker power, workplace culture, and gender composition and investigate the relationships posited by these theories using data culled from a comprehensive set

of book-length workplace ethnographies. This data source, derived from content coding this rich body of literature, combines the thick description of qualitative research with the degree of variation necessary to reveal more general organizational patterns. As each case represents at least 6 months of doctoral-level fieldwork targeting a single work group, these data reflect a broader scope and depth of experience relative to survey research, providing reliable information regarding key organizational attributes, while exposing the sometimes subtle and often behind-the-scenes nature of sexual harassment. We applied ordinal and multinomial logistic regression techniques to assess the relative power of competing and complementary organizational explanations for predicting sexual harassment. Our results support existing perspectives but also refine insights into how organizational attributes structure not only the presence but also the nature of sexual harassment.

## Conceptualizing Sexual Harassment

There is no universally accepted definition of sexual harassment. The most straightforward definition is a composite of “women-unfriendly behaviors,” including sexist but nonsexual comments and gestures (Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber, 1993).<sup>1</sup> Many of the more elaborate characterizations isolate nonsexual derogatory actions against women and divide the remaining forms by type, purpose, or severity. For example, Gruber (1992) identified 11 types of sexual harassment in three domains: verbal requests (ranging from subtle expressions to promises and threats), sexual remarks (ranging from jokes to solicitation), and nonverbal displays (ranging from gestures and pictures to forced sex). Other conceptualizations classify harassment with respect to directness and level of threat. Welsh (1999), for example, identified two broad categories of sexual harassment: (a) hostile environments and (b) threats, promises, and quid pro quo arrangements.

These approaches underscore diversity in the nature of sexual harassment and suggest substantial variation with regard to intent and severity. There is also reason to suspect that the character of sexual harassment varies systematically with workplace context. For example, women vulnerable to the capricious whims of supervisors or in physically demanding, traditionally male work groups may be subject to the most acute forms of harassment (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Gruber, 1998). Likewise, grievance procedures that shield women from more threatening forms of harassment may offer little protection from sexist but nonsexual innuendo.

Based in part on prior conceptualizations, we divide sexual harassment into *patronizing*, *taunting*, and *predatory* conduct. Similar to the more elaborate definitions of sexual harassment, our three-part conceptualization isolates sexist but nonsexual behaviors and divides the remainder by severity and intent. A chronic pattern of sexist but nonsexual remarks can contribute significantly to a hostile work environment and factors into most legal definitions of sexual harassment (Ehrenreich, 1999; Saguy, 2000; Zippel, 2004). We identify sexist but nonsexual comments, gestures, or condescension as patronizing. Sexual taunting includes sexual gestures, physical displays, and overly personal comments and queries producing a sexually hostile environment. Predatory sexual harassment is even more threatening, encompassing sexual solicitation, promises or threats, touching, and forced sexual contact.

## Theoretical Approaches

Organizations are set within the broader sociocultural environment, including patriarchy and pervasive gender socialization, which primes individuals for advancing and receiving sexual harassment at work (Hearn & Parkin, 2001; Welsh, 1999). Men refer to sociocultural expectations in determining what they feel are appropriate roles for women and how to relate to them in the workplace (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). Likewise, women who experience sexual harassment may refer to prevailing norms and to their position in the patriarchal social structure in deciding whether and how to respond.

Although sociocultural realities are vital to understanding the social backdrop for sexual harassment, organizational attributes are crucial determinants of its incidence and form (Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber, 1993). In other words, patriarchy and gender socialization help explain the cultural foundations underlying sexual harassment and victims' responses, but organizational context governs whether and how sexual harassment actually transpires in a given workplace (DiTomaso, 1989; Gruber, 1998). The theoretical literature underscores three salient features of organizations with implications for sexual harassment: *worker power*, *workplace culture*, and *gender composition*.

### Worker Power

Three sources of worker power have significant potential implications for sexual harassment: self-direction, formal grievance procedures, and job

insecurity. Power differentials stemming from workers' relative significance in the labor process may protect some employees from sexual harassment while rendering others more vulnerable. The dominant theory posits that women's subordinated organizational positions lessen their power in relation to potential harassers, rendering them vulnerable to sexual harassment (Welsh, 1999). Self-direction is a key component of power in this regard and is argued to limit harassment vulnerability because self-directed workers are typically more skilled and harder to replace than other segments of the workforce (Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber, 1993). Mueller, De Coster, and Estes (2001) confirmed that autonomy is negatively associated with the degree to which sexual harassment is perceived as a problem at work. Moreover, because self-direction typically entails at least some freedom of movement, it may allow workers greater capacity to limit their exposure to chronic harassers. Thus, we formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Greater self-direction reduces the likelihood of sexual harassment.

Although self-direction may indicate a degree of power offering protection from abuse, women with relatively high levels of organizational power may provoke resentment and thus become targets for sexual harassment. De Coster, Estes, and Mueller (1999) argued that women perceived as status seekers or threats to male monopolies on organizational resources may be targeted for sexual harassment, an instrumental strategy some men may use to assert their dominance and preserve their privileges. Their study found that women with more education and higher levels of job tenure were more likely to perceive sexual harassment as a problem, a phenomenon the authors attributed to the threat these women pose to male privilege. Likewise, Uggen and Blackstone (2004) found that supervisory authority was associated with increased exposure to sexual harassment. Significantly, all these characteristics reflect self-direction on the job, an organizational privilege that men have monopolized and from which they have sought to exclude women (see Westwood, 1984). Thus, we formulated the following contrary hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1b:* Greater self-direction increases the likelihood of sexual harassment.

Employees may also gain a measure of power vis-à-vis potential harassers through protective entities and policies. In their analysis of routine activities and social deviance, Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman,

and Johnston (1996) extended Cohen and Felson's (1979) notion of guardianship from the deterrence of crime through the presence of another person to the deterrence of more general deviance through a handler or authority figure who provides a measure of social control. Formal grievance procedures, even when they do not target sexual harassment, signal an organization's willingness to exercise social control and may discourage the occurrence of harassment (Mueller et al., 2001; but see also Dobbin & Kelly, 2007; Tinkler, Li, & Mollborn, 2007). Moreover, workplaces with formal grievance procedures may more extensively regulate relationships among employees at all levels, thus increasing constraint and lessening opportunities for sexual harassment. We thus formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* The presence of a formal grievance procedure reduces the likelihood of sexual harassment.

Research on female temporary workers demonstrates that tenuous links to the workplace can also accentuate vulnerability and increase a woman's odds of being sexually harassed at work. Rogers and Henson (1997) described temporary workers as a powerless, low-status, transitory, and largely female population, subject to arbitrary punishment and removal. Lacking even minimal job security, temporary workers have a compelling economic interest in maintaining their silence in the face of harassment, rendering them both extremely vulnerable to sexual harassment and powerless to combat it.

We argue that the implications of job insecurity may be more generalizable than previously assumed. We posit that tenuous links to jobs can expose even "permanent" employees to the threat of sexual harassment. In other words, any employees with limited job security are more vulnerable to sexual harassment because, like temporary workers, they are subject to arbitrary removal. Because such jobs are often taken out of economic need rather than intrinsic interest in the work, fear of job loss may be particularly effective in suppressing complaints. Recent research confirms that individuals with less financial security report more experience with sexual harassment (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004).

It may also be the case that transitory employment situations influence interpersonal relationships because expectations for future interactions are limited. Drawing from game theory's "shadow of the future," Heide and Miner (1992) found that the expectation of future contact significantly increases cooperation among organizational actors because of the potential

for future rewards and sanctions. We posit that job insecurity shortens any shadow of the future, because participants anticipate a more limited association, and thus opens the door for sexual harassment. We thus developed the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3: Job insecurity increases the likelihood of sexual harassment.*

## **Workplace Culture**

A second organizational foundation for sexual harassment is workplace culture. Cultural context and attendant normative expectations for behavior have significant implications for interpersonal dynamics within organizations, shaping behaviors and interactions of workers and management (Morrill, 1995). Four aspects of workplace culture may be particularly important for sexual harassment: *coworker solidarity*, *supervisor harmony*, *workplace anonymity*, and *physicality of the work*.

Prior research has pointed to both coworkers and supervisors as potential guardians against sexual harassment at work. De Coster et al. (1999) found that work group solidarity and a supportive work group culture reduce the degree to which sexual harassment is perceived as a problem at work, relationships they attributed to coworkers' investment in one another's well-being, their willingness to intercede and halt harassment, and support for victims' actions in their own defense through pursuing both formal and informal means of ending harassment. Mutually supportive coworkers are also less likely to prey on one another. Indeed, coworker solidarity is a significant component of workplace social integration, shown elsewhere to exert an independent negative effect on sexual harassment by promoting a generally civil and respectful environment (Mueller et al., 2001). We thus developed the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4: Coworker solidarity reduces the likelihood of sexual harassment.*

De Coster et al. (1999) further argued that supportive supervisors offer guardianship directly, by protecting workers from abuse, and indirectly, by giving workers confidence to serve as their own guardians (pursuing formal or informal assistance to halt abuse). Indeed, supervisor supportiveness was associated with a decreased likelihood of perceiving sexual harassment as a problem. Although active support is obviously beneficial to workers, many components of supervisory support are more passive (accessibility, response to concerns, genuine listening, and taking decisive action and

providing assistance when needed). Harmonious vertical relationships, marked by an absence of conflict between workers and their supervisors, should thus serve a guardianship function similar to coworker solidarity. Beyond the guardianship role, harmonious relationships are also indicative that supervisors are not themselves preying on workers. We thus formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 5:* Supervisor harmony reduces the likelihood of sexual harassment.

Large organizations can produce a certain degree of anonymity. Although routine contact is most concentrated within work groups, large organizations provide a setting in which perpetrators can sometimes enjoy at least partial anonymity, relative to organizations that are smaller in scale (Ingham, 1967). Small organizations link individuals in a more tightly woven network, whereas individuals in larger organizations are more loosely connected, less bound by informal norms, and more able to act without the awareness of others. Large firms also provide fewer opportunities for worker self-direction (and thus less worker power) relative to smaller firms (Kalleberg & Van Buren, 1996), and sheer numbers increase the odds that a motivated harasser is present in the workplace (De Coster et al., 1999). On the other hand, large organizations may have bureaucratic structures that can thwart the most acute forms of sexual harassment (Dobbin & Kelly, 2007). Bureaucratic procedures, formal authority, and increased accountability should also translate into protections for women in large organizations, at least against the most threatening forms of sexual harassment. We thus developed the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 6:* The anonymity of large organizations increases the likelihood of sexual harassment. However, larger organizations may offer protection against the most threatening forms of abuse.

A final aspect of workplace culture that may affect sexual harassment emerges from normative aspects of settings stemming from the physicality of work. Although women perform many physically demanding jobs, men numerically dominate many of the most physically demanding jobs, particularly ones that pay well. The physicality of work, especially in male-dominated workplaces, may increase sexual harassment for a number of reasons. It has been argued that difficult manual labor in predominantly male work environments is associated with a sexualized, masculine culture characterized by male solidarity and pride (Welsh, 1999). In this context, women's presence

may be perceived as a threat to men's masculinity and, in the case of very dangerous work, to their physical safety (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). Men motivated to harass women on this basis may also experience psychological rewards associated with fraternity and solidarity, especially when they do so in the presence of similarly situated men (Paap, 2006).

A second explanation for greater sexual harassment in physically demanding work is the defense of privileged job opportunities and wages against the incursion of lower paid labor (DiTomaso, 1989). Harassment may represent an attempt to exclude women, whose presence, men may fear, will drive down their own wages. Some men may also believe that women are secondary earners and that by driving women out they are defending the right of men to earn living wages for their families. High wages could also encourage women to endure harassment, including the most acute forms of abuse, especially for high-wage jobs with open access and few formal qualifications. We thus formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 7:* Greater physicality of work increases the odds of sexual harassment.

## Gender Composition

Net of the effects of worker power and workplace culture described above, the gender composition of work groups may influence the likelihood of sexual harassment. Sociological research offers a number of competing explanations for this relationship. Proponents of the *contact hypothesis* posit that the likelihood of sexual harassment is a function of contact between the sexes at work (Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990). Women in gender-mixed and predominantly male settings are argued to be at the greatest risk for sexual harassment, whereas women working in predominantly female settings are at the least risk by virtue of structural constraints on the frequency of their contact with men. De Coster et al. (1999) related this perspective to criminology's *routine activities* account of victimization—likening women in predominantly male environments to suitable targets in the proximity of motivated offenders—and demonstrated a positive relationship between the percentage male and women's likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment, net of a range of individual and organizational attributes.

In separate hypotheses, consistent with the expectation that sexual harassment is most prevalent in male-dominated settings, De Coster et al. (1999) posited greater consciousness and intent behind men's harassment of women in male-dominated workplaces. Specifically, their *power-threat*

hypothesis posits that at least some sexual harassment can be seen as an instrumental strategy to preserve the male monopoly on organizational privileges and to punish gender role-deviant women. We thus developed the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 8a:* A high proportion of men in a work group increases the likelihood of sexual harassment. Conversely, a high proportion of women in a work group reduces the likelihood of sexual harassment.

Although contact and routine activities explanations stress risk in predominantly male environments, the *gender salience* perspective suggests that sexual harassment is likely where sex distributions are skewed in either direction (Welsh, 1999). According to the perspective's *gender dominance* hypothesis, women working in traditionally male settings embody a threat to masculine role identities and male bonding in the workplace, reinforcing a tendency to target women, who are highly visible as a result of their low numbers (Gruber & Morgan, 2005; MacCorquodale & Jensen, 1993).<sup>2</sup> At the female end of the gender distribution, Gutek's (1985) notion of *sex role spillover* applies. Women in work groups with high proportions of women, such as maids and waitresses, are at increased risk for sexual harassment because they have little power, and their tasks become associated with subordinate female gender roles from other life domains (see also Konrad & Gutek, 1986; Ragins & Scandura, 1995). We thus formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 8b:* A gender distribution skewed in either direction will increase the likelihood of sexual harassment, resulting in a U-shaped relationship between percentage female and sexual harassment.

## Data, Measures, and Analytic Strategy

### Data

Our analysis is based on data derived from content coding of published book-length, English-language workplace ethnographies. These in-depth studies embody hundreds of person-years of doctoral-level research. Together, they provide a unique opportunity to investigate both the subtle nature of sexual harassment and its organizational context. Suitable ethnographies were selected using a two-part procedure. First, the population of workplace ethnographies was identified via computer-assisted searches of archives, examinations of bibliographies in located ethnographies, and the exploration

of library shelves around already identified ethnographies. In the second phase, each book was examined in detail. The purpose was to identify ethnographies focusing on distinct work groups, with data on organizational, managerial, worker, and labor force characteristics. Books not identifying at least one clearly identifiable work group (workers at the same organizational level responsible for a limited, identifiable set of tasks) in a single organizational setting were thus eliminated, along with those that were too short or thematic to yield useful data. For the current study, books lacking data relevant for coding sexual harassment were also eliminated. The result was a set of 110 work groups representing an array of industries, occupations, and organizations.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 presents the industrial and occupational locus of cases.

A team of four researchers developed the content-coding instrument. First, a list of variables and preliminary response categories representing core concepts in the workplace literature was generated. Second, team members each read and coded a common selected ethnography and then met to compare their respective codings and to discuss the retention or removal of items and the refinement of variables, response categories, and coding protocols. This process of reading, coding, and refinement was repeated for eight selected ethnographies. The goal was to create an instrument that trained coders could complete for all ethnographies with maximum reliability.

Once the coding instrument was finalized, the full set of ethnographies was read and coded by the same initial team of four researchers, participants in a yearlong graduate research practicum, and additional graduate research assistants supported through a National Science Foundation grant. All coders were trained to use a common protocol. Coders worked individually, documented their conclusions with page numbers, and met regularly to review each case in detail. Problems and questions were resolved as a group. If multiple examples (including conflicting reports) were present, the team reviewed relevant passages and came to a consensus regarding the best answer. To evaluate the reliability of the content coding process, 13% of cases were recoded. The average correlation was .79, indicating a relatively high degree of agreement among coders.<sup>4</sup>

## Measures

We evaluated the significance of a variety of organizational features for the prevalence of sexual harassment. Table 2 presents means and standard deviations for our dependent variables, explanatory variables, and a control variable documenting the year during which the original ethnographic research was completed.

**Table 1**  
**Industrial and Occupational Locus of**  
**Organizational Ethnographies (N = 110)**

Characteristic	Percentage
<b>Industry</b>	
Extractive and construction	9.2
Nondurable manufacturing	18.3
Durable and electronic manufacturing	10.1
Transportation equipment	10.1
Transportation, communication, and utilities	10.1
Wholesale and retail trade	9.2
Finance, insurance, real estate, and business services	6.4
Personal services	6.4
Professional and related services	15.6
Public administration	4.6
<b>Occupation</b>	
Professional	15.5
Managerial	10.0
Clerical	4.5
Sales	1.8
Skilled trade	12.7
Assembly	30.9
Unskilled labor	6.4
Service	14.5
Farm	3.6
<b>Employment size</b>	
<50	20.8
50 to 99	8.5
100 to 499	21.7
500 to 999	11.3
1,000 to 4,999	21.7
≥5,000	16.0

*Sexual harassment.* The dependent variable, sexual harassment, was a four-category variable indicating the degree of sexual harassment uncovered during the ethnographic study. The categories were none, patronizing, taunting, and predatory.<sup>5</sup> We took a conservative approach in coding the data, requiring explicit evidence for each of our classifications. Many workplace ethnographies do not broach topics associated with these phenomena, and we did not assume that this indicated an absence of sexual harassment. Nevertheless, the largest single category of sexual harassment was “none,” with 39% of cases (43 work groups) indicating that sexual harassment was not present in the workplace. It was often possible to discern an absence of

**Table 2**  
**Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent**  
**Variables (organizational ethnographies,  $N = 110$ )**

Variable	Definition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sexual harassment			
None	No sexual harassment	0.39	0.49
Patronizing	Sexist but nonsexual verbal communications or gestures	0.26	0.44
Taunting	Sexually oriented jokes or overly personal verbal communications or gestures	0.15	0.36
Predatory	Sexual solicitation, touch, threats, promises, or forced sexual contact	0.20	0.40
Ordinal measure	0 = none, 1 = patronizing, 2 = taunting, 3 = predatory	1.15	1.15
Worker power			
Self-direction <sup>a</sup>	Average of standardized measures of autonomy, creativity (both originally 1 = none, 2 = little, 3 = average, 4 = high, 5 = very high) and freedom of movement (originally 1 = little or none, 2 = average, 3 = a great deal)	-0.06	1.02
Grievance procedure	1 = yes, 0 = no	0.73	0.45
Job insecurity	1 = none, 2 = minimal, 3 = average, 4 = high	2.07	0.98
Workplace culture			
Coworker solidarity	1 = little or none, 2 = average, 3 = strong	2.18	0.85
Supervisor harmony	Frequency of conflict with supervisor: 1 = constant, 2 = frequent, 3 = average, 4 = infrequent, 5 = none	2.86	1.03
Anonymity	Logged number of employees in the organization	6.00	2.31
Physicality	Physical demands of work: 1 = easy, 2 = average, 3 = difficult, 4 = brutal	2.56	0.93
Gender composition			
Percentage female	Percentage of work group who are women	33.92	39.16
Squared percentage female	Squared percentage of work group who are women	2,669.44	3,854.56
Year	Year ethnographic research was completed	1978.93	11.69

a. Loadings were .93 for autonomy, .92 for creativity, and .86 for freedom of movement;  $\alpha = .89$ ; eigenvalues were 2.43 (first) and 0.38 (second).

sexual harassment from in-depth information on the nature of gender relations observed over the research period, which lasted an average of more than 2 years and typically involved participant observation. For example, the following description of gender relations in a counseling center served as evidence of an absence of sexual harassment.

The staff at Helpline had made distinct efforts to see that the women in the organization had as much power as the men. The men on the staff had become self-conscious about interrupting when women were talking at meetings and not expecting women to become fund raisers or coordinators. . . . [Women] were as likely as the men to be chosen as someone whose judgment another would respect on an issue relating to Helpline. (Mansbridge, 1980, p. 142)

Patronizing sexual harassment was defined as sexist but nonsexual comments, gestures, or condescension. Waitresses were patronized by managers in the following account of work in a casual restaurant.

[I asked the manager] if he would let me [cook]. He said no. . . . He said that I was too delicate and that once you got back there and all that grease and whatnot, that my face would break out, you know, and he said that it wasn't a good idea. That's the reason he gave me. (Paules, 1991, p. 113)

Taunting includes sexual gestures, physical displays, and overly personal comments and queries. For example, a male construction worker remarked about a female coworker, "Hey, Mary's all dressed up today, she's wearing a bra" (Applebaum, 1981, p. 131).

Predatory sexual harassment is the most threatening form of sexual harassment and includes sexual solicitation, promises or threats, touching, and forced sexual contact. In one study, female prison guards experienced harassment of this nature:

Several women claimed that after refusing the advances of superiors they were given unfavorable work assignments or poor performance evaluations. I was also told about women who had "voluntarily" left prison employment because of retaliation that followed their refusal to become sexually involved with superiors.

"Everyone here knows about Captain X. At first he tries his 'come on,' as if he's God's gift to women. If that doesn't work, he tells you what he can do for you if you're 'friendly.' If that fails, he threatens you with what he'll do if you don't cooperate. . . . Sally did everything she could to avoid him—even went on another shift—but he kept after her 'til finally she quit. Some girls just sleep with him and get it over with, I guess." (Zimmer, 1986, p. 93)

In our coding, we endeavored to reflect what was typical of the work setting. For sexual harassment, as well as the other variables included in the analysis, we coded characteristics and levels according to the ethnographers' descriptions of the general character of a given context. We accepted ethnographers' reports as providing realist accounts of the defining temper of a given workplace and credited them with not reporting the idiosyncratic or the exception as the norm (see Fine, 1999).

Cases were coded according to the most severe form of sexual harassment characteristic of the workplace, but when one form was present, the lesser forms typically accompanied it. For example, those exposed to predatory sexual harassment were also typically subject to taunting and patronizing behavior. Likewise, when workers experienced sexual taunting, they were usually subject to patronizing conduct as well.

Because of subjectivity involved in the labeling of sexual harassment, we identified each form of harassment on the basis of the specific behavioral criteria noted above. However, we also acknowledge that prevailing normative standards or legal definitions can influence what is experienced as sexual harassment and thus, indirectly, ethnographers' reports of harassment (Dellinger & Williams, 2002; Saguy, 2000; Zippel, 2004). Although we could not correct for instances in which ethnographers witnessed behaviors that we would classify as sexual harassment (or evidence of its absence) but did not report it in their text, inclusion of the year of completion of the study in the analysis at least partially controls for shifting social and legal definitions of sexual harassment.

*Worker power.* We used three variables to measure worker power. Self-direction measured potential power stemming from the nature of the work. It was an average of standardized measures of autonomy, creativity, and freedom of movement. Autonomy measures the degree of control workers have over their own tasks with regard to concerns such as the pace, timing, and methods used. Creativity is the degree to which workers must use their own ideas to complete their work. Freedom of movement is the measure of an individual's ability to move at will about the workplace. Workers with no self-direction, for example, are often required to ask permission to use the restroom. In a nursing home, for example, nursing aides were described as having very little self-direction:

Aides cannot take a patient off the floor or alter care plans, even adding chair padding, without a nurse's okay. . . . If a patient asks an aide for a certain kind of food, she cannot call the kitchen herself but must go through the coordinating

nurse. The same is true if the aide thinks some aspect of care determined by another department needs changing, say, the type of chair used. Aides cannot approach departments on their own; a nurse must do it. (Foner, 1994, p. 81)

The grievance procedure variable indicated the existence of formal policies or procedures that addressed workplace problems, including sexual harassment. Job insecurity was an overall measure, reflecting firings, lay-offs, and contingent employment relationships, and ranged from none to high. The following account of a domestic worker provides evidence of a high level of job insecurity: "The worst thing about domestic work is that there are no benefits, no sense of security. You're not covered for any unforeseen emergency. You're not even covered for tomorrow: they'll go away in a minute and leave you stuck" (Rollins, 1985, p. 76).

*Workplace culture.* We included four indicators of workplace culture. Coworker solidarity indicated strong social support and mutual defense among coworkers on the basis of a 3-point indicator ranging from little or none to strong. For example, an ethnographer described strong levels of coworker solidarity on an automotive assembly line:

Two days before December vacation, the car manager decided to work Trim and Final overtime with virtually no advance notice. Our team leader asked us, individually, whether or not we were willing to stay over. I declined and so did another woman on my team. Previously, the company had handed down a policy concerning overtime which stated that "scheduled" and "emergency" overtime were mandatory but "unscheduled" overtime was not. . . .

That afternoon, the group leader approached me and asked why I was not willing to work. I explained that I had not expected to work and had a medical appointment. Shortly after that, our team leader informed us that, "according to human resources, if we left at 3:00 P.M., it would be an unexcused absence." The company was instituting this policy on the spot. This caused a third woman on our team also to refuse the overtime. It was obvious to her that the company was simply fabricating the policy to force us to work. On principle, she decided to leave with us to protest the company's method of assigning unexcused absences. Now three members were leaving. (Graham, 1995, pp. 123-125)

Supervisor harmony was a 5-point, reverse-coded indicator of the frequency of conflict with supervisors. The following example indicates constant conflict, or an utter absence of harmony, with supervisors:

Eddie explains: “We’ve just had to destroy the foremen. . . . One or two of them have tried to get on top but they’re easy to beat. There are lots of things you can do to make it bad for them. The lads would do half the job, and play around with them. I’d set him up for cases and destroy him in the office. Every time I was in the office I’d say something about him. That’s what we *had* to do. We *had* to destroy the foremen.” (Beynon, 1975, p. 132)

Anonymity was measured as the logged number of employees in an organization. We measured this variable at the organizational level rather than the work group level to maintain consistency with its theoretical basis. Physicality was a 4-point measure of the physical demands of work, ranging from easy to brutal. For example, an ethnographer described the difficult physical demands of restaurant work:

In addition to the long hours, the job of waiting tables puts a heavy toll on servers’ bodies. Servers carry heavy, hot plates quickly through the dining room, sometimes balancing up to six or seven plates at a time. Servers do not often get formal breaks in their workday. Therefore servers can work ten to twelve hours and not sit once. They must squeeze in time between serving appetizers and entrees to go to the bathroom. Servers also learn to “eat on the fly.” They order food for themselves (after getting a manager’s approval), and then place it somewhere in the kitchen (often with a note that reads something like “Tara’s dinner—Do Not Throw Away!”). The food may sit for hours, with the server nibbling at bites whenever he/she has a free second. Such a lifestyle when performed long enough puts certain strains on muscles, bones, and digestive systems. (Gatta, 2002, p. 36)

*Gender composition.* We measured gender composition with the proportion female in a work group. The square of this variable was also included to capture curvilinear effects of proportion female on the incidence of sexual harassment. We measured this variable at the level of the work group rather than at the level of the organization (as for anonymity) for theoretical reasons. The arguments developed by both the gender salience and contact perspectives have to do with processes more proximate to work groups than to the broader organization. The gender salience perspective underscores the influence of threat and visibility in predominantly male work groups (the gender dominance hypothesis) and powerlessness, feminization, and sexualization in female-typed work (the sex role spillover hypothesis). The contact hypothesis makes its predictions on the basis of routine contact, including numbers and frequency of interactions, which are more likely to occur within, rather than between, work groups.

## Analytic Strategy

We used both ordered and multinomial logistic regression to analyze our four-category sexual harassment indicator. Ordered logistic regression accounts for the ordered nature of a dependent measure with a limited range of categories, while avoiding the potential for biased estimates associated with the assumption of equal distance between categories in ordinary least squares regression. Multinomial logistic regression does not account for ordered outcomes (Menard, 2001).<sup>6</sup> However, it has the potential to reveal associations between workplace features and particular forms of sexual harassment (i.e., patronizing, taunting, and predatory). In both analyses, the comparison group was cases with no sexual harassment.

Although relatively few cases were missing data for our independent variables, we used Royston's (2004, 2005) multiple imputation procedure to retain cases that would have been lost with listwise deletion.<sup>7</sup> These techniques produce consistent and reliable estimates and are among researchers' best tools for addressing missing data (Allison, 2001). The procedure we selected identifies missing data, imputes values from related variables, substitutes them for the missing data, and generates estimates. After doing this 10 times, it averages the estimates and reports the final coefficients, standard errors, and significance levels.

## Results

Table 3 displays unstandardized ordered logit coefficients for sexual harassment regressed on measures of worker power, workplace culture, and gender composition. This analytic technique simultaneously estimates equations for each category of the dependent variable (patronizing, taunting, and predatory) relative to the reference category (none) and provides one set of coefficients, in this case indicative of the explanatory variables' influence on the severity of sexual harassment.

This model provides strong support for the argument that organizational features influence the severity of sexual harassment. Self-direction was associated with an increase in the severity of sexual harassment, a finding consistent with Hypothesis 1b, which suggests that women with self-direction are threatening to some men and are thus targeted for abuse, but counter to Hypothesis 1a, which emphasized the protective aspects of self-direction, including status within the organization and freedom of movement. As expected, grievance procedures reduced the severity of sexual harassment, whereas job insecurity increased it.

**Table 3**  
**Unstandardized Coefficients From Ordinal Logistic Regression of**  
**Sexual Harassment on Worker Power, Workplace Culture, and**  
**Opportunity for Contact (organizational ethnographies,  $N = 110$ )**

Variable	Sexual Harassment <sup>a</sup>
Worker power	
Self-direction	0.417*
Grievance procedure	-1.670**
Job insecurity	0.622**
Workplace culture	
Coworker solidarity	-0.201
Supervisor harmony	-0.225
Anonymity	0.349**
Physicality	0.726**
Gender composition	
Percentage female	0.064*
Squared percentage female <sup>b</sup>	-0.005*
Year	0.057**
Cut 1	116.166**
Cut 2	117.950**
Cut 3	118.940**
Pseudo- $R^2$	.23
Log likelihood	-112.14

a. Categories included 0 = no sexual harassment, 1 = patronizing behavior, 2 = sexual taunting, and 3 = predatory sexual harassment.

b. Coefficient multiplied by 10 for ease of presentation.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (one-tailed tests).

All coefficients for indicators of workplace culture were in the expected direction, but not all were significant. Our measures of coworker solidarity and supervisor harmony had negative but nonsignificant effects on the severity of sexual harassment. The positive coefficients for anonymity and physicality were both significant. Finally, gender composition had a positive significant linear term in combination with a negative significant squared term. These results indicate that women's presence was positively associated with the severity of sexual harassment but that the relationship became weaker or reversed at higher rates of female representation.

Although these effects were generally consistent with our expectations, with the exception of the positive decaying slope for percentage female, ordered logistic regression may not provide an optimal solution in this case. In generating a single set of coefficients, this model assumes that coefficients would not be significantly altered if estimated independently.

Consistent with our suspicion that distinct organizational attributes engender particular forms of harassment, the Wald test (Brant, 1990) indicated that coefficients would in fact differ if estimated separately, suggesting that multinomial logistic regression would provide a better fitting model (Long & Freese, 2003, pp. 167-168).<sup>8</sup>

We now turn to the results of our multinomial logistic regression as a more accurate estimation strategy. Unstandardized coefficients predicting patronizing, taunting, and predatory sexual harassment are presented in Table 4. A separate set of coefficients were estimated for each type of sexual harassment, allowing us to evaluate the roles of various organizational features in promoting or curtailing distinct types of sexual harassment.<sup>9</sup>

## **Worker Power**

We hypothesized that the skill, status, and freedom of movement associated with self-direction offer workers protection from sexual harassment and, alternatively, that self-direction may cause women to be targeted for abuse. Positive but nonsignificant effects of self-direction on every form of harassment in the multinomial logit results were inconsistent with the protection hypothesis and provided only a modicum of support for the targeting hypothesis. We conclude that self-direction failed to protect women from any form of sexual harassment and may have helped identify women as potential targets for abuse. (Note also that the coefficient for self-direction was both positive and significant in the ordered logit results presented in Table 2, providing additional support for the targeting hypothesis.)

Grievance procedures did protect women from predatory harassment, and their influence on patronizing behavior and sexual taunting was also negative but nonsignificant. Formal grievance procedures may be especially effective in combating predatory harassment both because it is so well defined and because victims of sexual predation are more likely to make use of formal procedures. Even prior to the filing of a grievance, the mere existence of formal grievance procedures may signal to potential harassers the presence of a formal guardian along with organizational intolerance for sexual harassment, at least in its more extreme forms (Dobbin & Kelly, 2007).

Job insecurity significantly increased vulnerability to both taunting and predatory sexual harassment. Although the influence of insecurity on patronizing sexual harassment was positive, it was somewhat smaller and not significant. These findings suggest that a shortened shadow of the future and vulnerability to job loss increase women's risk for more acute forms of harassment by lowering both motivated harassers' inhibitions and victims'

**Table 4**  
**Unstandardized Coefficients From Multinomial Logistic Regression**  
**of Sexual Harassment on Worker Power, Workplace Culture, and**  
**Opportunity for Contact (organizational ethnographies,  $N = 110$ )**

Variable	Sexual Harassment <sup>a</sup>		
	Patronizing	Taunting	Predatory
Worker power			
Self-direction	0.470	0.724	0.609
Grievance procedure	-1.207	-1.154	-2.715*
Job insecurity	0.561	1.176*	1.155*
Workplace culture			
Coworker solidarity	-1.341*	-0.829	-0.545
Supervisor harmony	-1.061*	-0.498	-0.561
Anonymity	1.158***	1.148***	0.766**
Physicality	0.308	1.093*	1.307*
Gender composition			
Percentage female	0.117*	0.138**	0.128*
Squared percentage female <sup>b</sup>	-0.008	-0.010*	-0.010*
Year	0.106*	0.103*	0.097*
Constant	-214.494*	-214.720*	-200.371*
Pseudo- $R^2$	.413	.413	.413
Log likelihood	-85.260	-85.260	-85.260

a. The reference category is "none."

b. Coefficients multiplied by 10 for ease of presentation.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (one-tailed tests).

likelihood of seeking redress. The following quotation captures the experiences of sexual harassment for women working in a meatpacking facility, a job characterized by high levels of job insecurity:

Sexual violations pervaded the IBP plant while I worked there. . . . Sexually explicit graffiti appeared on walls and posters; men grabbed their crotches and made sexual gestures toward women. Men frequently clutched and fondled women. With this bravado, men controlled the space on the production floor, in the cafeteria, and in the halls. The only place where women could relax and converse on their own terms was the locker room. (Fink, 1998, p. 109)

## Workplace Culture

All coefficients for measures of workplace culture were in the expected directions. However, coefficient size and significance varied with the form

of sexual harassment considered. Interestingly, reductions in sexual harassment attributable to worker solidarity and supervisor harmony were significant only for patronizing behaviors. An example of the protective influence of coworker solidarity against this form of harassment is evident in Spradley and Mann's (1975) account of cocktail servers: "Waitresses are especially supportive of one another when it comes to dealings with the bartenders, and usually unite against direct 'attack' concerning their collective ability or intelligence" (p. 74). Increased anonymity in larger organizations increased the likelihood of all three forms of sexual harassment. The coefficient for predatory sexual harassment was somewhat smaller than those associated with patronizing behavior and sexual taunting, suggesting that formal protections characteristic of large organizations may mitigate the influence of anonymity on the most extreme forms of abuse in a manner similar to the protective role of explicit grievance procedures.

As expected, the physicality of work encouraged both taunting and predatory sexual harassment, as indicated by large and significant positive coefficients. Interestingly, the coefficient for patronizing behavior was smaller and nonsignificant. The literature suggests that the preoccupation with physical aspects of bodies in such environments translates into an emphasis on the sexual, that women in physically demanding work may be perceived as threats to men's safety and power in the workplace, and that sexually oriented abuse is a means to punish gender role deviance. Our finding that physically demanding work increased the likelihood that women would experience jokes, put-downs, sexual solicitation, threats, touching, and forced sexual contact supports these arguments. Significantly, this effect was apparent net of the influence of gender composition of work groups. The role of workplace culture in shaping the likelihood and nature of sexual harassment, along with women's responses, is evident from the following example from an ethnography of female shipyard workers:

Female sexuality was simultaneously an object of ridicule, fascination, and uneasiness in the shipyards. The pervasive emphasis on sexuality may have been viewed as a method of easing the tensions created by women's presence in the shipyards. While some women recognized that this defusing of tension was at the expense of women's dignity as workers, there was neither the language nor the organizational means to challenge it. . . . Often, women were made to feel that the norms of shipyard behavior were set by men and were violated at one's peril. Doris Avshalomov, for example, told "them very loudly to cut it out" when male workers tried to back her into a corner and touch her. "And then when they'd see me they'd make little noises and cat-calls implying that I was a prude." (Kesselman, 1990, p. 63)

## Gender Composition

Our findings indicate that gender composition is an important aspect of organizational context for every form of sexual harassment. The coefficient for percentage female was positive and significant in every case, and the small negative effects of its square were significant for taunting and predatory harassment. In other words, there was a positive relationship between percentage female and the likelihood of every form of sexual harassment, but the association leveled off or reversed with higher female representation in the case of taunting or predatory harassment.

Although these results contradict both gender composition hypotheses, they are consistent with rationales from which they were derived. The contact, power-threat, and gender spillover arguments predict the highest levels of sexual harassment in predominantly male work groups. However, levels of female participation vary significantly among work groups that may be described as predominantly male. Not surprisingly, work groups lacking women, the usual victims of sexual harassment, had the lowest incidence of harassment. Where women were present, the likelihood of sexual harassment in male-dominated settings increased with the percentage female.

This finding indicates that sexual harassment is not simply a matter of women's contact with men on the job but also reflects motivations arising out of perceptions of what women's presence means for men in these settings. Both the power-threat and male dominance perspectives characterize harassment in predominantly male environments as a response to the perception that women's presence embodies a threat—to male monopolies on organizational resources in the case of the former and to masculine ideology in the case of the latter. Although it is plausible that one woman would have this effect, it is perhaps more conceivable that the fear of usurpation would emerge in the presence of small but sizable proportions of women, particularly in settings in which their numbers are increasing over time. In other words, although the presence of many men increases women's likelihood of contact with potential harassers, small but sizable proportions of women would enhance the likelihood of at least some men being motivated to actually engage in harassment. The influence of routine contact along with motivations reflecting masculine ideology and threat are evident in a female car salesperson's account of her experience on a lot:

When I first started, I wanted to learn from the guys, but that led to stuff like "Jesus Christ, why don't you go out with me? I've really got something to offer you. When are we going on a date? C'mon. Sex between us would be really great." If that didn't get me to leave, somebody would say, "Leave the

room so I can tell this joke.” One guy finally said, “What are you doing here? You’re taking up space where a male could be supporting his family.” Now I keep my distance. (Lawson, 2000, p. 42)

The square of percentage female had a significant and negative effect on taunting and predatory harassment, indicating that the highest levels of female representation offered a measure of protection from the more extreme forms of abuse. It is easier and safer to target individuals when they are in the minority rather than numerically dominant. Predominantly female settings also limit routine exposure to the other sex, a factor emphasized in the contact hypothesis, and may foster norms with the potential to deter the more extreme forms of abuse. Indeed, shipyard women in Kesselman’s (1990) study reported that they felt safer from predatory harassment when surrounded by other women.

The presence of more women, however, did not necessarily protect workers from patronizing behaviors, as indicated by the insignificance of the squared term’s small but negative coefficient for this form of harassment. Unlike taunting and predatory harassment, which were subject to downward pressure at the highest rates of female representation, patronizing harassment was most evident where women’s participation was greatest. This finding is consistent with the sex role spillover argument, which posits that higher proportions of women increase harassment in jobs populated by women, as work tasks are conflated with the broader gender roles of its female incumbents. The following passage describes the patronizing treatment of a work group of female assembly workers by their male supervisor in a mechanical and electrical components factory in London:

The battles over the clock also showed how sexist their authority was. There was no way Sean Cooney could have told men to go and stand at their benches—men would have taken no notice. The tone of voice was of a man in authority talking down to a woman in a much lower position, as if we were a bit stupid for not realising what the punishment would be if our misdemeanours were reported to management. Calling us “girls” and “dear” created an air of paternalism that would never have been possible with men. (Cavendish, 1982, p. 90)

This quotation gives a sense of the relative ease with which the women in predominantly female work groups are patronized and the cultural obstacles to eliminating it, even in the presence of large numbers of women. Further obstacles may include what proponents of the gender spillover thesis argue is failure to acknowledge abusive behaviors as sexual harassment in the first place (Gutek & Morasch, 1982) or, in service settings, expectations of deference toward even abusive and harassing customers.

## Discussion

Our goal was to examine the organizational antecedents of sexual harassment. Specifically, we sought to evaluate whether and to what extent theories regarding worker power, workplace culture, and gender composition help explain sexual harassment against women at work. Content coding of the population of English-language, book-length organizational ethnographies allowed us to test relevant hypotheses with data on work groups spanning an array of occupational, industrial, and organizational settings and to adjudicate between competing and complementary explanations for sexual harassment. Moreover, we were able to investigate the degree to which theories vary in their capacity to explain three distinct varieties of sexual harassment: patronizing, taunting, and predatory. Findings from ordered logit analysis and multinomial logit analysis suggest that although these general theoretical explanations can be used to predict the increasing severity of sexual harassment, different forms of sexual harassment may also be conceived of as distinct phenomena with distinct patterns of causation.

Our results clearly support approaching sexual harassment as an organizational-level phenomenon. Our data reveal patterns linking organizational attributes to both the severity and form of sexual harassment, allowing us to address the complexity of sexual harassment in the organizational context. We are thus able to confirm the merits of existing sociological theories while demonstrating that current theories of sexual harassment at work differ in their capacity to predict distinct forms of sexual harassment.

Worker power influences the risk for sexual harassment, but the effects vary depending on the nature of power and the form of harassment considered. Our results suggest that self-direction does not offer protection against any form of sexual harassment and may indeed provoke aggression against women as targets of abuse. Likewise, grievance procedures do not afford the protection often suggested or assumed (see Dobbin & Kelly, 2007; Tinkler et al., 2007), although they are effective in deterring the most threatening, and well-defined, form of predatory harassment. At the same time, job insecurity is associated with risk for exposure to sexual taunting and predation, a finding suggesting that prior theory specific to vulnerability among temporary workers is more generalizable than initially assumed.

Workplace culture predicts every form of sexual harassment but in diverse ways. Supervisor harmony and coworker solidarity offer some protection but only against patronizing behaviors, the least severe form of harassment. The anonymity of large organizations, on the other hand, increases the likelihood of all types of harassment, albeit to a lesser degree

in the case of predatory sexual predation, likely because of large organizations' built-in protections against the most extreme forms of abuse. Physically demanding work promotes a masculine, body-centered, and sexualized work culture that encourages both sexual taunting and predation.

We also find that sexual harassment in all its forms is influenced by the gender composition of work groups, but its effects vary at different levels of female representation and with the type of harassment considered. The proportion female is positively associated with increases in every form of sexual harassment, including those reflecting an instrumental aim to preserve either masculine ideology or male monopoly of privilege. Where the proportion female is highest, women receive some protection from the two more threatening forms of sexual harassment. But patronizing harassment is most likely in predominantly female work groups, suggesting a spillover of broader societal gender roles and ideology into the context of female-typed work settings. Together, these findings represent a significant elaboration on and refinement of earlier arguments about the implications of gender composition of work groups.

The most threatening forms of harassment are most likely in situations in which workers face employment insecurity, there is great anonymity, work is physically demanding, and work groups are gender mixed. The effect of job insecurity in prompting taunting and predatory sexual harassment reflects power imbalances and reduced protections for employees, as well as a shortened shadow of the future for potential harassers. Weaker connections among coworkers within large organizations, coupled with a decreased emphasis on local reputation, undermine bureaucratic protections of large organizations. The influence of physicality and mixed-gender groups indicates an effort by some male workers to undermine women and potentially to drive them out in response to preoccupations with sexuality, or perceived threats to either their sense of masculinity or to their monopoly of organizational rewards.

## Conclusion

Our analysis was made possible through the combined insights of organizational ethnographers, who combine the insider knowledge of a workplace participant with the keen eye of a trained observer, uncovering sometimes subtle and frequently underreported instances of sexual harassment while providing a relatively unbiased, nonlocalized account of its occurrence. These data help remove the influence of normative context in whether workers label, or fail to label, sexual harassment as such, an important obstacle to

research on this topic (Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999; Saguy, 2000; Zippel, 2004). Indeed, despite its prevalence and laws barring it in the workplace, sexual harassment often goes unrecognized by workers, who take institutionalized practices for granted or ignore it for fear of dismissal or in an attempt to cope (Dellinger & Williams, 2002; Quinn, 2002; Rogers & Henson, 1997; Uggen & Blackstone, 2004; Welsh, 1999; Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 1999).

Our use of measures that uncover sexual harassment in contexts in which those experiencing it may not identify it as such, along with our theoretically based specification of multiple forms of sexual harassment, helps explain instances in which our findings diverge from or add nuance to those reported in other research. For example, our findings differ from those of earlier studies with regard to the influence of potential victims' vulnerability and the degree of protection offered by supportive coworkers and supervisors (see De Coster et al., 1999; Mueller et al., 2001). We find that vulnerability arising out of job insecurity is a significant factor in risk for exposure to sexual taunting and predation and that supportive coworkers and supervisors offer protection from patronizing behaviors but not from these more threatening forms of harassment. Our data may be better positioned to reveal the effects of employee vulnerability, because ethnographers' accounts are not subject to the influence of sample selection bias resulting from victims' tendency to quit their jobs following sexual harassment or to be fired subsequent to making a formal complaint. Moreover, our detailed indicators of type of sexual harassment allow us to tease apart distinct causal patterns, as in the case of protections against patronizing sexual harassment accruing from coworker and supervisor support.

The ability to distinguish between types of abuse also helps us extend existing accounts of the relationship between gender composition and sexual harassment, providing support for an array of theoretical arguments and demonstrating where and how they apply. At relatively low rates of female participation, every form of harassment appears to increase with women's presence in the workplace. At the other end of the gender distribution, further increases in the percentage female provide a measure of protection against the more extreme predatory forms of sexual harassment but increase the risk for exposure to patronizing behavior. Ethnographers' ability to identify sexual harassment apart from its normative interpretation is particularly beneficial for revealing processes associated with gender spillover in predominantly female environments, in which sexual harassment is less likely to be identified as such because it is regarded as "part of the job" (Gutek & Morasch, 1982).

In simultaneously exposing harassment and placing it in its normative context, ethnographers help illuminate the complex and occasionally interactive nature of harassment underscored in recent studies (e.g., Dellinger & Williams, 2002; Williams et al., 1999). The following example, drawn from a mixed-gender setting, demonstrates the influence of the normative context in defining sexual harassment as acceptable behavior but also underscores the potential for harassment to be interactive, even consensual, despite concurrent instances of victimization in the more traditional sense:

The restaurant environment was quite close-knit. Workers tended to socialize outside of work and much of the servers' downtime during their work shift was spent preserving these friendships. Despite the fact that women made up the majority of the workers, they did not hold a large portion of the social power. Instead, in order to curry favor of their peers, many times they had to enact traditional gender roles. . . . The maintenance of these friendships occurred within the context of sexual practices. What struck me during my participant observation studies was that servers work in a highly sexualized environment. There was a lot of heterosexual kissing (under the guise of friendly pecks on the lips at almost any time), massages given at lulls in shifts, sexual jokes, and reported heterosexual sex between servers. . . . In addition to the sexual behaviors, there was much touching and fondling between the male and female workers at the restaurant. Perhaps a small portion of it could be attributed to the physically close proximity in which the servers worked, so that bumping into others often occurred. However, I found that there was a great deal of touching outside of these "accidents." At one point I told a manager that it made me uncomfortable to see and be a victim of so many physical intrusions. . . . Even more disturbing was that there were also many examples of behavior that could be labeled as sexual harassment. A clear example of this was how one manager would [share] his micro card with waitresses. . . . A particular manager had his micro card . . . hooked onto his belt loop and when a waitress needed the card, he told her to grab the card and slide it into the computer. As she did that, he made pelvic thrusts. (Gatta, 2002, p. 94)

The ethnographer's efforts in teasing apart objective and subjective definitions of sexual harassment are apparent, as are the obstacles to reducing sexual harassment in this or any setting without addressing the meaning of behaviors in their organizational and cultural context.

One frequently proposed firewall against sexual harassment in the workplace is formal training in the definition and consequences of sexual harassment. But although training may combat ignorance, it is not always effective in helping individuals link their own concrete behaviors or circumstances in

specific normative contexts to relatively abstract definitions and processes (Quinn, 2002). And just as normative cultures may impede the effectiveness of training, they may also interfere with the success of formal guardianship in deterring sexual harassment. Formal procedures provide redress, but they are most beneficial when they prevent abuse rather than provide restitution after the fact. This requires that potential perpetrators understand what policies mean vis-à-vis their own behaviors. Returning to the ethnographies helps illustrate how formal policies are more effective when men receive assistance in understanding what their behaviors actually mean to women:

During interviews at CAMI, we asked if concerns had been raised over problems of sexual harassment and the policies in place. . . . One worker recounted her experience: "It depends on the team leader and the guys on the team. You get jokes. I was getting harassed, but I talked to my union rep."

A woman area leader also acknowledged cases of harassment within teams: "I've had some problems. I had to talk to a team about harassment. I had to clarify it with them. I had to tell them what it meant, what it meant to them, and what it meant to the woman. You know, we had a team that hadn't had a woman for a long time, and she went into that team. So I've dealt with that. It's hard for a woman that's never worked in that environment to go into an environment and have it poisoned. Because it was a poisoned environment." (Rinehart, Huxley, & Robertson, 1997, p. 120)

In this particular workplace, jokes of a sexual nature eventually came to be understood as a specific abusive behavior rather than as an acceptable aspect of interpersonal relations; they were taken seriously and harassment was resolved before it escalated. These factors may be crucial in translating formal procedures into preventive guardianship.

Our findings thus suggest important policy implications. First, because organizational attributes provide foundations for sexual harassment, effective protections can be offered and enforced at the organization level, not just after the fact at the individual level through litigation or monetary compensation. In other words, organizational policy can and must be proactive in its approach to protecting women. Second, increased job insecurity entails greater risk for both taunting and predatory sexual harassment, which can further increase instability in a workplace as victims of harassment quit and leave the organization. As various forms of contingent work increase, taunting and predatory sexual harassment may also increase as the expectation of future contact diminishes. An awareness of this reality may better equip those in guardian roles to preempt nascent cultures of harassment. Third, organizational size matters: Anonymity facilitates all types of

sexual harassment, and this lack of accountability can override protections offered by bureaucratic governance structures typical of large organizations. In summary, organizational context is a crucial determinant of sexual harassment, and an understanding of how it shapes such behaviors is essential for finding and implementing effective solutions.

## Notes

1. Although men can experience sexual harassment, research demonstrates that the overwhelmingly dominant pattern is male-on-female harassment (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). Our theoretical discussion reflects this pattern. However, in coding the data, we were careful not to allow assumptions about the sex of perpetrators or victims to color our identification of behaviors constituting sexual harassment.

2. The gender dominance argument is consistent with arguments stressing the physicality of the work (i.e., harassment is more likely in male-typical jobs). However, its emphasis is on gender composition and women's resulting visibility, not on the nature of the work.

3. Cases that fit the original data selection criteria but did not provide enough information to code sexual harassment were excluded from the analysis. Ninety-four cases were rejected from the total sample ( $N = 204$ ) on this basis, yielding an effective sample size of 110. Among cases included in the analysis, researchers spent an average of more than 2 years in the field. Most were participant observers (69%); others relied on observation (20%) or interviews (11%).

4. The code sheet, coding protocol, and data are available at <http://www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/rdh/Workplace-Ethnography-Project.html>. As with any content analysis project, we may have made errors in the interpretation of the texts or in the coding of the data. The data, however, are available for public scrutiny and reanalysis and we welcome suggestions, criticisms, and alternative views on the recorded data.

5. Observers attribute most sexual harassment to those occupying relatively powerful supervisory roles (Kilduff, 2001). Our evidence both supports and conditions this assumption. Organizations are fraught with potential perpetrators, and many are indeed supervisors. However, our data also indicate a high degree of correlation (.82) between harassment from supervisors and harassment from coworkers. In other words, organizational factors encouraging supervisory harassment also tend to generate it among coworkers, supporting the argument that organizational context is central to producing or preventing sexual harassment. The current analysis was thus of sexual harassment in the workplace, regardless of its source.

6. When analyzing an ordered dependent variable, the multinomial approach loses some efficiency but tends to produce unbiased estimates.

7. This approach to multiple imputation is consistent with the method of multiple imputation by chained equations advocated by van Buuren, Boshuizen, and Knook (1999).

8. We used the Hausman test (Hausman & McFadden, 1984, p. 1226; Long & Freese, 2003, p. 207) in Stata 9 and found that our multinomial approach did not violate the assumption of the independence of irrelevant alternatives. This indicates that the odds between any pair of dependent variable categories do not depend on other available outcomes. Multinomial probit analysis yielded comparable results.

9. The timing of original research had a small but positive and significant influence on each level of sexual harassment, which could be interpreted as reflecting either heightened sensitivity over time to behavior constituting sexual harassment or actual increases in sexual harassment,

possibly in response to growing rates of female employment. Regardless, our quantitative results indicate relationships net of any factors having to do with the passage of time. Separate controls for ethnographer's gender and the substantive focus of research were not significant and were excluded from the final models.

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