

# Frightened or Bothered: Two Types of Sexual Harassment Appraisals

Social Psychological and  
Personality Science  
000(00) 1-9  
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DOI: 10.1177/1948550611402520  
http://spps.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

The present study distinguishes between bothersome versus frightening sexual harassment appraisals and examines their relative strength as mediators of the relationship of sexual harassment intensity and perpetrator status with psychological distress. Using a sample of 6,304 men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces, the results indicated that sexual harassment intensity and perpetrator status were related to psychological distress. For men, bothersome appraisals mediated this relationship for two of the three sexual harassment subtypes examined and for perpetrator status; for women, bothersome appraisal was not a significant mediator. Frightening appraisals mediated the relationship for all sexual harassment subtypes and perpetrator status for both men and women, and accounted for significantly more of the relationship between sexual harassment intensity and distress than did bothersome appraisals for most analyses. However, mediating relationships were significantly stronger for men than for women. We discuss the utility of a multidimensional conceptualization of sexual harassment appraisals.

## Keywords

appraisal, sexual harassment, sex/gender, stress and coping, status/rank

Sexual harassment has been associated with a number of negative physical, psychological, and job-related outcomes (e.g., Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Research suggests that the extent to which targets perceive the harassment to be upsetting mediates the relationship between the intensity of the harassment and the outcomes with which it is associated (e.g., Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997; Langhout et al., 2006; Woods, Buchanan, & Settles, 2009). Most studies have either examined sexual harassment appraisals as a unidimensional construct or examined only one aspect of appraisals (e.g., how bothersome it was). However, recent study results suggest that specific appraisals of the sexual harassment experience are differentially related to outcomes (e.g., Wright & Fitzgerald, 2009), but more research is needed to clarify the nature of these relationships. Thus, the goal of the present study was to examine whether two types of sexual harassment appraisals (bothersome vs. frightening) mediate the relationship of sexual harassment intensity and perpetrator status with psychological distress, and to examine gender differences in these mediational relationships. We used a sample of men and women in the U.S. military because of the relatively high rates of sexual harassment experienced by men and women in that context (Burke, 2004; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1997).

## Sexual Harassment: Definition, Prevalence, and Outcomes

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted gender-based comments or behaviors (Fitzgerald, 1996) with three subtypes.

*Gender harassment* refers to behaviors that disparage an individual on the basis of her or his gender (e.g., comments that insult women's intelligence; comments regarding behaviors a "real man" would do). *Unwanted sexual attention* refers to unwanted touching or attempts to establish a sexual relationship (e.g., repeated requests for dates). Finally, *sexual coercion* refers to attempts to coerce a sexual relationship in exchange for job-related threats or benefits (e.g., promising a promotion if the target engages in sexual activities).

Although women are more frequently the targets of sexual harassment, men can be targets as well. It is estimated that approximately 50% of working women (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003) and approximately 15% of men have at least one sexual harassment experience at work (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2004), with higher rates in male-dominated environments. For example, annual rates of sexual harassment among U.S. military personnel are between 65% and 79% for women (Bastian, Lancaster, & Reist, 1996; Department of Defense (DoD), 2004; Department of Defense Inspector General,

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2005; Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999; Hansen, 2004) and over 35% for men (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2001).

Research suggests that perpetrators of sexual harassment, whether targeting men or women, are typically male (e.g., Huerta, Cortina, Pang, Torges, & Magley, 2006; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1998). Theorists suggest that sexual harassment is enacted to dominate and control others (Berdahl, 2007; Morgan & Gruber, 2005) and male gender role norms reward men for exerting their power over other men and women (Tangri & Hayes, 1997). Consistent with these theories, higher organizational status protects against negative workplace experiences (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Settles, Buchanan, & Colar, 2011), and when the perpetrator has higher status and power, the harassment is perceived as being more severe (e.g., Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Sexual harassment has been consistently associated with negative psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and general clinical symptomology (Willness et al., 2007). Further, these negative psychological effects have been found to persist for years after the sexual harassment has ended (Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000). Notably, the extent to which sexual harassment is harmful depends, in part, on the way in which the experience is appraised by the target, emphasizing the importance of appraisal processes in this phenomenon.

### *Appraisals of Sexual Harassment*

According to models of stress and coping, an event that taxes or depletes an individual's resources (e.g., workplace sexual harassment) qualifies as a stressor and can have negative effects on psychological functioning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Appraisal is a two-step process through which an individual determines the relevance of a particular stressor (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). During primary appraisal, an individual assesses the potential challenge, loss, threat, or harm a particular stressor poses (either benign or severe) in a given context; this appraisal process influences the coping response and subsequent outcomes resulting from the event (Peacock & Wong, 1990; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Ansiman, 2009).

Sexual harassment theories have also placed primary appraisal processes in a central role (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Several studies have since supported the theory that sexual harassment appraisals mediate the relationship between sexual harassment frequency or intensity and outcomes, including coping strategies (Malamut & Offerman, 2001), job outcomes (Langhout et al., 2006), and psychological outcomes (Langhout et al., 2006; Woods et al., 2009). Similarly, harassment frequency (de Haas, Timmerman, & Höing, 2009; Fitzgerald, Buchanan, Collinsworth, Magley, & Ramos, 1999; Hitlan, Schneider, & Walsh, 2006) and intensity have been associated with more negative appraisals of the harassment (Collinsworth, 2004; Kinney, 2003; Reed, 2004), and consequently, poorer mental and physical health (de Haas et al., 2009). Some research has examined gender differences in appraisals. For

example, compared to men, women appraised harassment vignettes as more anxiety-producing (Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996) and were more likely to rate their personal experiences of sexual harassment as bothersome (de Haas et al., 2009).

Past research on sexual harassment appraisals has been limited because the vast majority of studies have conceptualized appraisal as a unidimensional construct and failed to examine how differing types of appraisals of the behavior influence outcomes. Some notable exceptions compare appraisals within single-sex samples. For example, Glomb and Espelage (2005) found that when men perceived the behaviors in a vignette as sexual harassment, they appraised it as fear and anger inducing. In a sample of sexually harassed females, Wright and Fitzgerald (2007) found that four types of appraisals (demoralization, anxious arousal, fear, and self-blame) were differentially related to characteristics of the harassment and the individual. Further, Wright and Fitzgerald (2009) examined demoralization and fear appraisals, and found that sexually harassed women who chose to enter a class action were more likely to have appraised their harassment as demoralizing. Thus, there are multiple types of appraisals that may result from a situation, and appraisal type may relate to behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Although several recent studies have begun to examine whether sexual harassment is appraised in qualitatively different ways, none has fully integrated this question into the model of harm proposed by Fitzgerald et al. (1997), or compared men and women in studies of multiple appraisal types. The present study does so by examining two types of sexual harassment appraisal as mediators of the relationship between sexual harassment intensity, perpetrator status, and psychological distress for both women and men. Specifically, we examine appraisals of the harassment as bothersome (i.e., annoying and offensive) and frightening (i.e., threatening and frightening). Thus, our conceptualization is most similar to that examined by Wright and Fitzgerald (2009).

Because of the characteristics associated with negative emotions generally, and fear specifically, we hypothesized that fear appraisals would more strongly mediate the relationship of sexual harassment intensity and perpetrator status with psychological distress, than would bothersome appraisals. Negative emotions, like fear, are associated with a narrowing of cognitive attention (Fredrickson, 2004), poor coping, and increased distress (Gunther, Cohen, & Aremlu, 1999). Other research has found that it is not only the valence (i.e., positive vs. negative) of the emotion that matters for outcomes but also the specific emotion. For example, fear is associated with higher arousal than being annoyed or bothered, suggesting that fear is a more intense emotion (Russell, 1980). Fear arousal requires that individuals engage in behaviors and cognitions to alleviate the negative emotions, whereas less intense emotions do not require comparable personal and psychological resources (Hasting & Stead, 2004). Additionally, Lerner and Keltner (2001) found that fearful individuals make more pessimistic judgments and choices than angry individuals suggesting different outcomes are associated with different emotions with the same valence.

Thus, the experience of fear following harassment may more adversely impact mental health than the experience of less intense emotions like feeling bothered.

### The Current Study

We examine our questions in a sample of female and male personnel in the U.S. military, providing us with a large sample in which to examine sexual harassment experiences. Rates of sexual harassment in the military are high compared to other work contexts, consistent with the prevalence of sexual harassment in other hierarchical and male-dominated environments (Burke, 2004; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1997). We also examine whether the theorized appraisal processes differ for men and women. Women report more sexual harassment, label more behaviors as representing sexual harassment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001), and may also be more likely to appraise harassment events negatively (Berdahl, 2007; Berdahl et al., 1996). These factors may lead them to be more negatively impacted (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Further, power and status differences between the harassment perpetrator and target increase the risk for negative outcomes (e.g., Langhout et al., 2006). Because women in the military are overrepresented at the lower ranks compared to men (Stoeber, Schmaling, Gutierrez, Blume, & Fonseca, 2007), they hold less power and may be more negatively affected by harassment from a higher status perpetrator.

### Hypotheses

1. The relationship between more intense sexual harassment and psychological distress, and between higher perpetrator status and psychological distress, will be mediated by appraisals of the harassment as bothersome and frightening for both men and women.
2. Appraisals of sexual harassment as frightening will be a stronger mediator of the relationship between sexual harassment and psychological distress, and between perpetrator status and psychological distress, than appraisals of sexual harassment as bothersome for both men and women.
3. Meditational relationships will be stronger for women than men.

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

Participants in the study were 6,304 men and women who participated in the 2002 DoD's "Status of the Armed Forces Surveys: Workplace and Gender Relations." This survey, administered by the Data Recognition Corporation for the Defense Manpower Data Center in order to protect the confidentiality of participants, was sent to all active armed services personnel (for survey procedures, see Lipari & Lancaster, 2004; Willis, Mohamed, & Lipari, 2002).

The present study included men ( $n = 1,764$ , 28%) and women ( $n = 4,540$ , 72%) who endorsed having had any sexual harassment experiences (19.4% of males and 51.7% of females in the full sample) as assessed by the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire-DoD (SEQ-DoD; described below; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Fitzgerald et al., 1988). To maintain participant confidentiality, the publicly available dataset placed participants into one of three racial/ethnic groups: Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 881$ , 14%), non-Hispanic/Latino White ( $n = 4,067$ , 65%), and non-Hispanic/Latino Black/African American ( $n = 1,356$ , 22%).

### Measures

For all scales, items were averaged and computed such that higher scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

**Sex.** Participants reported their sex, 0 (*female*) or 1 (*male*).

**Sexual harassment.** Participants reporting at least one unprofessional, gender-related behavior in the past year (according to the SEQ-DoD [Fitzgerald et al., 1999]) were then asked to consider the "one situation" in the past year that had the greatest effect on them. Using the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire-Significant Experience (SEQ-SE; Mazzeo, Bergman, Buchanan, Drasgow, & Fitzgerald, 2001), participants indicated whether the "one situation" did (1) or did not (0) involve 16 unwanted or uninvited, unprofessional, gender-related behaviors. Eight items assessed experiences of gender harassment (e.g., "Referred to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms"; "Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to you"). Four items assessed Unwanted Sexual Attention (e.g., "Touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable"). Four items assessed Sexual Coercion (e.g., "Made you feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative"). Items in the SEQ-SE are behaviorally based and do not require the participant to label the behavior as sexual harassment.

**Appraisal of sexual harassment.** Following the SEQ-SE, participants indicated how much they perceived the "one situation" to be annoying, offensive, frightening, and threatening using a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). Bothersome appraisal was the average annoying and offensive ratings ( $r = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and frightening appraisal was the average of frightening and threatening ratings ( $r = .76$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Sexual harassment perpetrator status.** Following the SEQ-SE, participants reported on the status of the person(s) involved in the significant experience. Responses were categorized by the perpetrators' status relative to the participant, 0 (*equal or lower rank*) or 1 (*higher rank*).

**Psychological distress.** Psychological distress was assessed using five items from the Rand Corporation's Short Form Health Survey (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992). Items assessed how often in the past 4 weeks participants had experienced depressed mood (e.g., "felt downhearted and blue") using a scale that ranged from 1 (*little or none of the time*) to 4 (*all or most of the time*).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender harassment	.32	.26	(.86)	.22*	.27*	.19*	.42*	.31*	.19*
2. Unwanted sexual attention	.16	.28	.19*	(.83)	.43*	.12*	.23*	.36*	.12*
3. Sexual coercion	.03	.14	.21*	.44*	(.85)	.13*	.18*	.37*	.13*
4. Perpetrator status	.68	.47	.17*	-.02	.08*	—	.20*	.19*	.09*
5. Bothersome appraisals	2.18	1.15	.43*	.14*	.09*	.20*	(.80)	.46*	.12*
6. Frightening appraisals	.55	1.00	.29*	.24*	.27*	.21*	.41*	(.86)	.20*
7. Psychological distress	1.91	.67	.14*	.10*	.11*	.15*	.16*	.21*	(.84)
<i>M</i>	—	—	.17	.05	.01	.46	1.38	.21	1.87
<i>SD</i>	—	—	.18	.16	.07	.50	1.15	.63	.64

Note: Figures in parentheses are Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's. Means and standard deviations in column for women, in rows for men. Correlations above the diagonal are for women, below the diagonal are for men.

\*  $p < .05$ .

## Results

Table 1 presents bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for women and men, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's for all variables. To test Hypothesis 1, we assessed the indirect effect of each sexual harassment subtype and status of perpetrator on psychological distress via bothersome and frightening appraisals using Mplus5 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007). In six separate analyses examining each individual sexual harassment subtype (three for each sex), sexual harassment and perpetrator status were entered as the predictor variables, psychological distress was entered as the outcome variable, and appraisals of sexual harassment as bothersome and frightening were entered as simultaneous mediators in a single model and were allowed to correlate.

Results of these analyses are summarized in Figures 1 through 3; results for the three models, testing each sexual harassment subtype, were similar. Gender harassment (Figure 1), unwanted sexual attention (Figure 2), and sexual coercion (Figure 3) were all positively associated with psychological distress for women; however, gender harassment and sexual coercion were not related to psychological distress for men, when other variables were taken into account. Status of the perpetrator was related to psychological distress, for both men and women, in all three models. Each sexual harassment subtype and perpetrator status was significantly related to bothersome appraisals and frightening appraisals for both men and women. Appraisals of the significant sexual harassment experienced as bothersome were positively related to psychological distress for men in all three models. However, for women, bothersome appraisals were unrelated to psychological distress across all models. Finally, frightening appraisals of the significant sexual harassment experience were related to greater psychological distress for both men and women in all three models.

Table 2 presents the results of the indirect effects of each sexual harassment subtype and perpetrator status on psychological distress via the two types of appraisals. These analyses indicate whether one or both types of appraisal account for the mediating effect in each model. Results indicated that bothersome appraisals mediated the relationship between gender harassment and distress, and between unwanted sexual attention

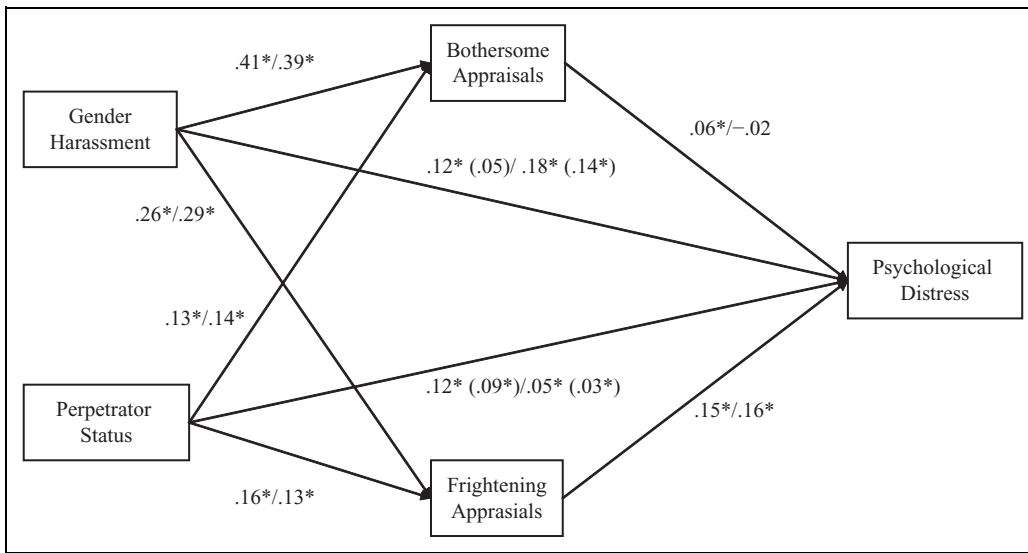
and distress, for men but not women. Bothersome appraisals did not significantly mediate the relationship between sexual coercion and distress for men or women. In contrast, frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between all three sexual harassment subtypes and psychological distress for both men and women. The relationship between the status of the sexual harassment perpetrator and distress was mediated by bothersome appraisals in the models for unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (but not gender harassment) for men; bothersome appraisals did not mediate the relationship between perpetrator status and distress for any of the models for women. In contrast, frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator status and psychological distress for both men and women for all three models.

Further analyses tested the relative strength of the indirect effects of each appraisal type (Table 2). Results indicated that for women, the sizes of the indirect effects for frightening sexual harassment appraisals were significantly larger than the indirect effects for bothersome appraisals for all three sexual harassment subtypes and for perpetrator status in all models. For men, the sizes of the indirect effects via frightening appraisals were significantly larger than via bothersome appraisals for unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. However, for gender harassment and for perpetrator status, bothersome and frightening appraisals did not differ in their mediating effect. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported for women, and partially supported for men.

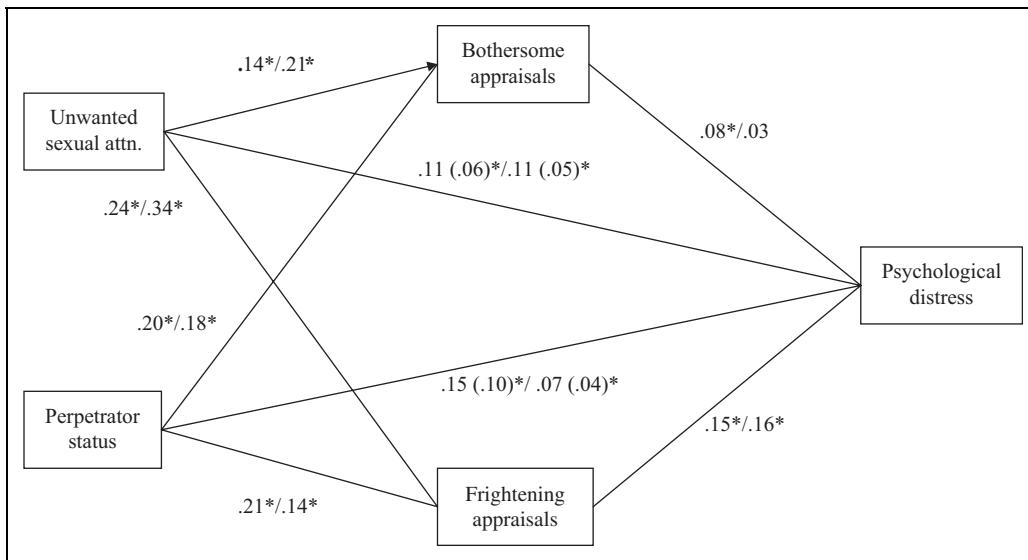
Our third prediction was that mediational relationships would be stronger for women than for men. We tested this by comparing model fit in models where the indirect pathways were constrained for men and women to unconstrained models. The results (Table 2) indicated that, opposite to Hypothesis 3, the indirect effects of all tested relationships via bothersome and frightening appraisals were significantly stronger for men than for women.

## Discussion

The present study sought to test the relative strength of two types of sexual harassment appraisals as mediators of the



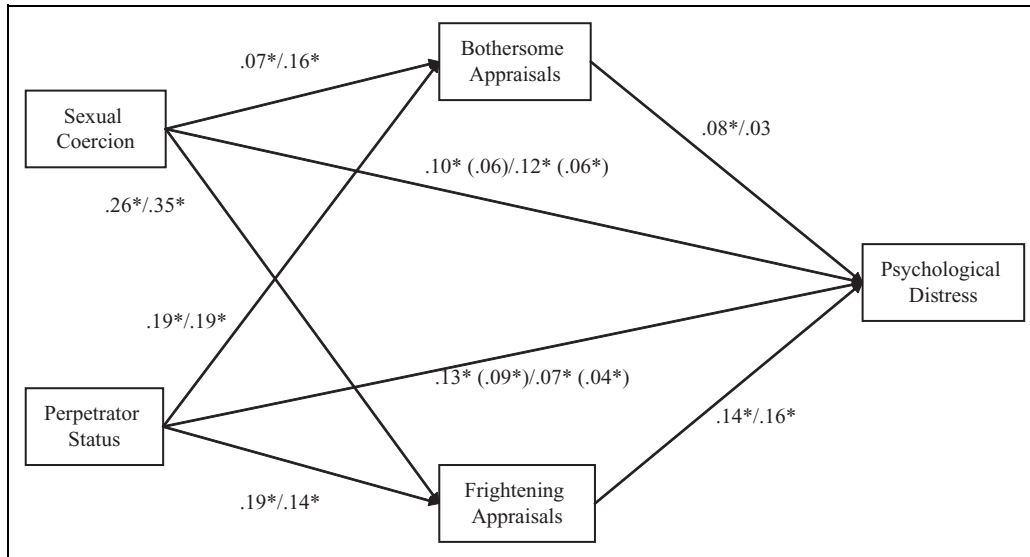
**Figure 1.** The mediating role of appraisals of sexual harassment as bothersome and appraisals of sexual harassment as frightening in the relation between gender harassment, perpetrator status, and psychological distress  
 Note: Coefficients are standardized; those in parentheses represent the direct effect with the mediators in the model. Coefficients left of the slash represent values for males ( $n = 1,764$ ), coefficients right of the slash represent values for females ( $n = 4,540$ ). \* $p < .05$ .



**Figure 2.** The mediating role of appraisals of sexual harassment as bothersome and appraisals of sexual harassment as frightening in the relation between unwanted sexual attention, perpetrator status, and psychological distress  
 Note: Coefficients are standardized; those in parentheses represent the direct effect with the mediators in the model. Coefficients left of the slash represent values for males ( $n = 1,764$ ), coefficients right of the slash represent values for females ( $n = 4,540$ ). \* $p < .05$ .

relationship of sexual harassment intensity and perpetrator status with psychological distress. Further, we wanted to determine whether the patterns of mediation differed for women and men. Hypothesis 1 proposed that both bothersome and frightening appraisals would significantly mediate the relationship between sexual harassment intensity and psychological distress, and between perpetrator status and

psychological distress. For women, bothersome appraisals did not significantly mediate the relationship between any subtype of sexual harassment or perpetrator status and psychological distress. For men, bothersome appraisals mediated the relationship of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention with psychological distress. Men’s appraisal of harassment as bothersome also mediated the relationship between perpetrator



**Figure 3.** The mediating role of appraisals of sexual harassment as bothersome and appraisals of sexual harassment as frightening in the relation between sexual coercion, perpetrator status, and psychological distress  
 Note: Coefficients are standardized; those in parentheses represent the direct effect with the mediators in the model. Coefficients left of the slash represent values for males ( $n = 1,764$ ), coefficients right of the slash represent values for females ( $n = 4,540$ ). \* $p < .05$ .

**Table 2.** Estimates for Specific Indirect Effects

	Bothersome Appraisal			Frightening Appraisal			Difference in Indirect Effects Between Bothersome and Frightening Appraisals	
	Men $b$ ( $\beta$ )	Women $b$ ( $\beta$ )	$\chi^2$ Diff	Men $b$ ( $\beta$ )	Women $b$ ( $\beta$ )	$\chi^2$ Diff	Men [95% CI]	Women [95% CI]
<b>Model: gender harassment</b>								
Gender harassment	.09 (.03)*	-.02 (-.01)	53.95*	.14 (.04)*	.12 (.05)*	33.83*	[-.15, .08]	[-.17, -.06]
Perpetrator status	.01 (.01)	-.00 (-.00)	11.97*	.03 (.02)*	.03 (.02)*	15.96*	[-.04, .01]	[-.04, -.02]
<b>Model: unwanted sexual attention</b>								
Unwanted sexual attention	.04 (.01)*	.01 (.01)	13.46*	.14 (.04)*	.13 (.06)*	19.74*	[-.19, -.01]	[-.15, -.06]
Perpetrator status	.02 (.02)*	.01 (.01)	8.56*	.04 (.03)*	.03 (.02)*	10.23*	[-.05, .02]	[-.04, -.01]
<b>Model: sexual coercion</b>								
Sexual coercion	.06 (.01)	.02 (.01)	8.15*	.34 (.04)*	.27 (.06)*	9.71*	[-.56, -.09]	[-.31, -.14]
Perpetrator status	.02 (.02)*	.01 (.01)**	8.23*	.03 (.03)*	.03 (.02)*	11.89*	[-.04, .02]	[-.04, -.004]

Note: 95% confidence intervals created using 5,000 bootstrap resamples.  
 \*  $p < .05$ .

status and psychological distress for the models examining unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion, but not gender harassment. Thus, to the extent that men’s sexual harassment was more intense or perpetrated by someone of higher status, it was also viewed as more bothersome which was associated with greater reports of distress.

A clearer pattern of results was found for frightening appraisals such that this type of sexual harassment appraisal significantly mediated the relationship between all subtypes of harassment and psychological distress, and perpetrator status and psychological distress, for both men and women. Thus, more intense sexual harassment or harassment where the perpetrator was of higher status was related to perceiving the harassment as more frightening and threatening, which was related to greater psychological distress. In addition, Hypothesis 2 was

supported for women in that for all subtypes of sexual harassment and perpetrator status, frightening appraisals accounted for significantly more of the relationship between sexual harassment intensity and distress than did bothersome appraisals. For men, for two of the three harassment subtypes (but not gender harassment or perpetrator status), frightening appraisals were a significantly stronger mediator than bothersome appraisals.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of fear appraisals. Although feeling annoyed or bothered and being afraid are both negative emotions, fear is a more intense emotion that involves affective and cognitive resources (Hasting & Stead, 2004; Russell, 1980). A fearful appraisal may also mean that there is a perception of greater threat and potential harm. Consistent with stress and coping theory, a

fearful encounter may be more likely to tax or exceed the individual's personal and psychological resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Conversely, stressful encounters appraised as bothersome may be perceived as challenging but may ultimately be managed effectively by one's available resources. This is not to minimize the impact of bothersome sexual harassment which may more consistently be associated with different types of outcomes not examined in this study or may lead to psychological distress when experienced over extended periods of time.

Although we predicted that appraisals would more strongly mediate the relationships of harassment and perpetrator status with distress for women than men (Hypothesis 3), we found the opposite result for all relationships. That is, the indirect effects of sexual harassment and perpetrator status on psychological distress through bothersome and frightening appraisals were significantly greater for men than women. Thus, appraisals of sexual harassment appear to account for more of the psychological impact for men than for women. This is not to say that sexual harassment or perpetrator status is less distressing for women than men; in fact, although all subtypes of harassment were positively related to distress for women, only unwanted sexual attention was related to distress for men after accounting for the other model variables. Further, consistent with past research (e.g., Cortina et al., 2002), we found that when the sexual harassment perpetrator had higher status, targets reported more psychological distress. However, only for men did bothersome appraisals mediate this relationship. Thus, these results suggest that the appraisal process better predicts psychological distress following harassment for men than for women.

In hindsight, the findings can be understood by considering that some studies find that men sometimes report sexual harassment to be flattering or amusing (Berdahl et al., 1996). Such findings suggest that it is not the frequency or intensity of sexual harassment that predicts outcomes for men; rather, how it is appraised by men is a significant factor in explaining when harassment has negative psychological consequences. When sexual harassment reaches the point where it is perceived to be bothersome or frightening, then it is associated with men's psychological distress. For women, bothersome appraisals were not found to account for any relationships with distress (although frightening appraisals did). Sexual harassment that is perceived to be annoying may be less psychologically distressing for women because of their previous experience with harassing behaviors in other venues; thus women are more likely to have coping mechanisms to deal with such experiences (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007).

Future research should examine an expanded range of emotional responses so as to be better able to determine the many possible ways harassment could be appraised by targets. As our analyses used preexisting data, we were unable to do so in the present study. One limitation of our study is that it was comprised of individuals in the U.S. Armed Forces who may differ from the general population in important ways. For example, the military is both masculine in culture and male-dominated, placing value on hierarchy and adherence to norms and rules

for behavior (Burke, 2004; Hillman, 1999). Environments where sexual harassment is more likely to occur are more likely to have these characteristics (Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1997). However, we expect that appraisal processes of interest in this research would operate similarly in diverse situations and the use of a military sample was beneficial because it provided us with a sufficiently large sample of sexually harassed men.

We note that some of our effects are small, but still significant because of our large sample size. This is particularly the case of the indirect effects associated with bothersome appraisals. In addition, our appraisal measures were assessed with only two items each because these were the only items available in these preexisting data. Although this type of problem often occurs with secondary data analysis, future studies should expand upon the existing measures. Using existing data has limited our study in other ways as well. For example, we do not know the sexual orientation of the victim or perpetrator, which limits our understanding of the motivation behind the harassment, which might have effects on how the harassment was appraised. Sexual minority individuals are especially likely to be targets of sexual harassment (Cortina, Swan, Fitzgerald, & Waldo, 1998), but we cannot assess this in the present data because the military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy did not permit the inclusion of such a question in the survey. Personnel targeted with harassment because they are gay or lesbian might be especially fearful—both for their personal safety and also for their job security should the perpetrator make their sexual orientation public.

Despite these limitations, our results strongly suggest that researchers consider the specific emotions engendered by the experience of sexual harassment, as the type of emotional response may importantly influence the outcomes of the experience. We found that for women, frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between the sexual harassment intensity, perpetrator status and psychological distress, and that for men bothersome and frightening appraisals did so. Further, for women and some of the relationships for men, frightening appraisals more strongly mediated relationships than did bothersome appraisals, highlighting the psychological significance of this type of emotional response. This suggests a move away from the unidimensional construction of sexual harassment appraisal in which the focus is just on how upsetting the experience is to a multidimensional framework that considers myriad emotional responses. Such a recommendation is consistent with other research by Wright and Fitzgerald (2009) who found differences in women's choice to litigate depending on the way in which they appraised their sexual harassment. However, as a multidimensional conceptualization of sexual harassment appraisals is relatively nascent, more research is needed to determine the relevance of different types of appraisals in this experience.

#### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

## Financial Disclosure/Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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## Bios

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