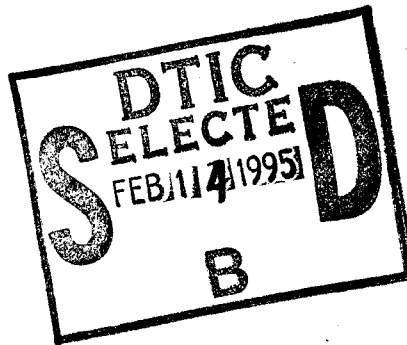




# Gender Differences in Conceptualizing Sexual Harassment

Marie D. Thomas



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## **Gender Differences in Conceptualizing Sexual Harassment**

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<p>13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)</p> <p>The purpose of this study was to identify gender differences in interpreting behaviors as sexually harassing and to investigate variables that Navy enlisted personnel consider when making such judgments. Three hundred and forty-seven enlisted men and women from three San Diego Navy sites took part in the study. Each participant was administered a questionnaire, and a subsample of personnel participated in focus groups.</p> <p>Key findings are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The scenarios considered by the Navy to depict sexual harassment were viewed by the study participants as moderately to extremely serious behaviors, and the more serious behaviors were considered sexual harassment.</li> <li>2. Mild, ambiguous behaviors, such as dirty jokes and coarse language, were generally not viewed as sexual harassment by the study participants.</li> <li>3. Overall, women rated the harassment behaviors as more serious than did men, and women were more likely than men to regard these behaviors as sexual harassment.</li> <li>4. Men slightly overestimated women's seriousness and sexual harassment ratings of the behaviors. Women greatly underestimated men's ratings.</li> <li>5. Participants were more likely to rate scenario behaviors as interfering with work performance and creating a hostile environment than they were to label the behaviors "sexual harassment."</li> <li>6. Women participating in focus groups indicated that their male coworkers often expressed negative attitudes toward Navy women and were punishing women for the Navy's current sensitivity to sexual harassment.</li> <li>7. While men did not express overtly negative attitudes toward women in the focus groups, there was general agreement that women often were overly sensitive and quick to label a behavior as sexual harassment.</li> </ol>					
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## Foreword

This report is the result of a one-year research project investigating how Navy women and men conceptualize sexual harassment. The findings and recommendations are for the use of the Chief of Naval Personnel (PERS-00W and PERS-61) and the Chief of Naval Education and Training (N3, Director of Training).

The effort was sponsored by the Chief of Naval Personnel (PERS-61) within reimbursable Work Unit 93WREE502. The results are expected to benefit the Navy by providing information needed to counter misunderstandings about the behaviors that constitute sexual harassment.

The author wishes to thank the points of contact at each command who made arrangements for administering the questionnaire and conducting focus groups, and all personnel who participated in the study. She is indebted to Nicole Ellis, Jack Edwards, and Paul Rosenfeld for the time and effort they contributed to this project by conducting focus groups. The author also thanks Zannette Perry and Kristin David for their help with data input and analysis; their dedication enabled her to finish this project on time. Special thanks go to Stephanie Booth-Kewley and Patricia J. Thomas for their helpful comments on this manuscript.

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# **Summary**

## **Problem**

Sexual harassment is a recognized workplace problem in both military and civilian settings. Despite greater public awareness and, in many cases, formal training, questions remain about what behaviors constitute sexual harassment.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify gender differences in interpreting behaviors as sexually harassing and to investigate variables that Navy enlisted personnel consider when making such judgments.

## **Approach**

Three hundred and forty-seven enlisted men and women from three San Diego Navy sites took part in the study. All participants were administered questionnaires, and a subsample of personnel participated in focus groups. The instrument consisted of 16 short scenarios depicting a variety of behaviors, most of which are considered to be sexual harassment by the Navy. After reading each scenario, respondents made a series of judgments about the seriousness of the described behavior, whether they thought it would affect the work environment, whether they thought the situation would create a hostile work environment, whether it was sexual harassment, and whether the Navy would consider the behavior as sexual harassment.

## **Findings**

1. The scenario behaviors considered to be examples of sexual harassment by the Navy were viewed by the study participants as moderately to extremely serious. The participants considered the more serious behaviors to be sexual harassment.
2. Mild, ambiguous scenario behaviors, such as dirty jokes and coarse language, were generally not viewed as sexual harassment by the study participants. Many also believed that the Navy did not consider these behaviors to be sexual harassment.
3. Overall, women rated the harassment behaviors as more serious than men, and women were more likely than men to regard these behaviors as sexual harassment.
4. Men tended to overestimate the "average" woman's ratings of the behaviors. Women tended to greatly underestimate men's ratings.
5. Both female and male participants were more likely to rate scenario behaviors as interfering with work performance and creating a hostile environment than they were to label the behaviors "sexual harassment."
6. Women participating in focus groups indicated that their male coworkers often expressed negative attitudes toward Navy women. Some women thought men were punishing women for the Navy's current sensitivity to sexual harassment.

7. While men did not express overtly negative attitudes toward women in the focus groups, there was general agreement that women often were overly sensitive and quick to label a behavior as sexual harassment.

8. For some men who participated in focus groups, behaviors they labeled sexually harassing when occurring in the work place (for example, sexual remarks or pressure for dates) were considered acceptable if they occurred in a social setting (such as an on-base club).

## **Conclusions**

1. Navy personnel consider unwanted sexually-oriented behaviors directed towards a particular individual to be sexual harassment. They also know that the Navy considers these behaviors to be sexual harassment.

2. As is the case with civilians, many Navy personnel do not consider mild forms of sexually-inappropriate behavior to be sexual harassment. Many do not know that the Navy's definition of sexual harassment also includes these behaviors.

3. Many enlisted women, particularly those in sea-intensive ratings and work centers, experience mild forms of sexual harassment regularly.

4. Enlisted personnel often do not label as "sexual harassment" behavior that they believe interferes with work performance or creates a hostile environment.

5. Sexual harassment of Navy personnel occurs not only within the work center but also in on-base settings outside of work.

## **Recommendations**

1. In its sexual harassment training, the Navy should continue to make clear that behaviors which create a hostile environment constitute sexual harassment.

2. The Navy should include in sexual harassment prevention training a discussion of behaviors that occur on base but out of the work center (for example, at on-base social events), and at off-base Navy-sponsored events.

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# Introduction

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify gender differences in interpreting behaviors as sexually harassing and to determine variables that individuals consider when making such judgments.

## Background

Many studies have shown that close to half the female work force has been sexually harassed (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993). Research on sexual harassment suggests that prevalence rates are even higher in occupations and settings considered less traditional for women (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Gutek, 1985; Lafontaine & Tredeau, 1986).

Researchers (e.g., Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989) have shown that most people agree that behaviors such as assault are sexually harassing. However, considerable variability of opinion exists about mild forms of harassment.

The Navy has experienced negative publicity in the past 2 years because of incidents involving sexually-inappropriate behavior (e.g., the Tailhook Convention in Las Vegas). According to large-scale surveys of Navy personnel (Culbertson, Rosenfeld, & Newell, 1993; Quenette, 1992), between 44% and 73% of enlisted women, and between 33% and 60% of women officers report having been harassed in the Navy environment.

The wide range in percentages of women reporting sexual harassment experiences results from the way the survey questions were posed. The 1991 administration of the Navy Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment (NEOSH) Survey tested two different forms of sexual harassment questions (Culbertson et al., 1993). One, termed the "direct query" method, provided the official Navy definition of sexual harassment, asked respondents if they had ever been sexually harassed, and if they had, asked about incidence and prevalence of various forms of sexually harassing behaviors. Using this method, 44% of enlisted women reported that they had been sexually harassed (Culbertson et al., 1993). The second form, called the "behavioral experiences" method, simply asked respondents whether they had experienced any of a series of unwanted sexual harassment behaviors. With this method, the incidence rate rose to 74%, matching the findings of the 1991 Navy-wide Personnel Survey (Quenette, 1992). A similar situation was found for women officers: with the direct query method, 33% of women officers reported experiencing behaviors the respondents themselves defined as sexual harassment, while the behavioral experiences method found that 60% of women officers had actually experienced the behaviors in question (Culbertson et al., 1993).

The direct query method may provide a low-end estimate of prevalence because it requires respondents to have both experienced the behaviors in question and to label them as sexual harassment. The behavioral experiences method, on the other hand, does not require that a behavior be labeled as sexual harassment for its occurrence to be included in the calculation of a sexual harassment rate. Some experts in the field (e.g., Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993) believe that the words "sexual harassment" should be avoided when assessing incidence and prevalence. In any case, the work of Culbertson et al. (1993) clearly illustrates that women experience behaviors that

fall under the Navy definition of sexual harassment but are not necessarily labeling these behaviors as such.

The Navy has confronted the problem of sexual harassment by issuing a zero tolerance policy and by instituting mandatory annual training in the prevention of sexual harassment. However, individual definitions of harassment, particularly regarding behaviors like wolf whistles, lewd comments, dirty jokes, and foul language, present problems. These mild, more ambiguous behaviors are particularly important to study because they are the most prevalent forms of sexual harassment among civilians (Terpstra & Baker, 1991) and in the Navy (Culbertson et al., 1993; Quenette, 1992), and have long been part of the informal Navy culture. The study described in this report was designed to assess the perceptions of enlisted Navy personnel about behaviors considered to be sexually harassing by the Navy.

Most studies of sexual harassment perceptions in the civilian literature use, as their approach, the evaluation of a scenario or vignette of a potentially harassing situation. In many studies (e.g., Gutek, Morasch, & Cohen, 1983), dimensions of the situation, such as gender and status of the initiator, behavior initiated, and victim response, are systematically varied. This approach generally presents participants with one or two behaviors to evaluate.

Other researchers use a standard set of scenarios in which the harassing behaviors vary in severity (e.g., Baker, Terpstra, & Larntz, 1990). This method allows participants to evaluate a range of behaviors, from mild to severe, but does not attempt to systematically manipulate aspects of the scenarios such as status of the initiator. With this approach, Terpstra and Baker (1987) developed a hierarchy of sexual harassment using the percentages of respondents (women and men) who labeled each behavior as sexual harassment to rank the behaviors. A sexual proposition tied to a job threat was viewed as sexual harassment by 99% of the participants, while only 19% viewed coarse language as sexual harassment.

Since the early 1980's, the many studies on sexual harassment perceptions and attributions have consistently found a gender difference: women are more likely to perceive behaviors as sexual harassment than are men (Fitzgerald, 1990; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993). The studies conducted by Terpstra and Baker (1987) and Baker, Terpstra, and Cutler (1990) using standardized scenarios are exceptions; they found little evidence of gender differences. These researchers attributed their unusual findings to either men's increased consciousness about sexual harassment issues or to the unambiguous nature of their scenarios. Gutek (1985) noted that men tend to view ambiguous social-sexual situations more positively than do women. Baker, Terpstra, and Cutler (1990) suggested that stimulus ambiguity increases gender differences and that the gender differences reported by other researchers might have been inflated by artifacts of the instruments used. Because the Terpstra and Baker (1987) scenarios provide information about the actors' gender and type of behavior that occurred, "(s)uch scenarios may decrease ambiguity, resulting in a more reliable measurement of perceptual differences between women and men" (Baker, Terpstra, and Cutler, 1990, p. 413).

Several variables have been found to increase the likelihood that a behavior will be viewed as sexually harassing. A behavior is more likely to be considered sexual harassment if the initiator has a higher status than the behavior target (such as a supervisor harassing a subordinate), if the behavior is repeated, if the target is not suggestive in her/his actions or attire, and if the initiator

and target have not dated (Fitzgerald, 1990; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Pryor, 1985). In addition, the more severe the behavior, the more likely it will be perceived as sexually harassing. Actions such as lewd jokes, leers, whistles, and obscene gestures, especially when they are part of social interaction within a particular environment and are not directed at a particular person, are much less likely to be perceived as sexually harassing (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993).

Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) believe that the research discussed above documents and reflects "society's ambivalence about whether such behaviors are really inappropriate, serious, offensive, and so forth" (p. 13). Despite the Navy's policy of zero tolerance of sexual harassment, the events of the past 2 years illustrate a certain ambivalence on the part of Navy personnel about sexual harassment. The design of this study included determining how serious Navy personnel consider behaviors typically defined as sexually harassing, and whether they would label these behaviors as sexual harassment.

## Approach

### Participants

Three hundred and forty-seven enlisted men and women from three San Diego Navy sites (a naval station, an air station, and a submarine tender) took part in the study. These commands were chosen because the women assigned to them often worked with men and were not concentrated in female-dominated ratings. Table 1 presents demographic information about the participants.

**Table 1**  
**Participant Demographics**

Variable	Women ( <i>N</i> = 159)	Men ( <i>N</i> = 188)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 347)
Paygrade (%)			
E-4 and below	57	45	50
E-5 and above	43	55	50
Rating Group (%)			
Shore-intensive	32	33	32
Sea-intensive	50	64	58
Nonrated	18	3	10
Mean Age	25.8	28.2	27.1
Mean Years in Navy	5.8	7.8	6.9

Men as a group were older, of higher paygrade, and had been in the Navy longer than were the women. A higher percentage of men were in sea-intensive ratings than were women, while more women were nonrated. The percentage of women in the sample who worked in sea-intensive ratings (50%) was much higher than for women in the Navy in general (about 21%); this is a

function of the sites selected for participation in the study. Tenders and naval stations are common assignments for personnel in sea-intensive ratings.

## Questionnaire

The main portion of the instrument developed for this study consisted of 16 short scenarios. Each scenario depicted an interaction between a chief petty officer and a petty officer, between two petty officers, or among a petty officer and more than one peer. The behaviors selected for the study were chosen from a model developed by the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) for their Elimination of Sexual Harassment training (U.S. Marine Corps, 1992). The Navy subsequently adopted the model in its booklet *Resolving Conflict* (Department of Navy, 1993). This "traffic signal" model categorizes behaviors as Red, Yellow, and Green Zone. The Red Zone encompasses serious harassment behaviors such as sexual assault and rewards in exchange for sexual behaviors. Green Zone behaviors are acceptable and include performance counseling; polite compliments; and nonsexual, nonthreatening touching. Yellow Zone behaviors (for example, violating personal space, lewd comments, foul language) are more ambiguous than Red or Green Zone behaviors. Yellow Zone behaviors tend to be subject to individual interpretation but are regarded, by most people, as inappropriate. According to *Resolving Conflict* (Department of Navy, 1993), "How yellow behavior is perceived depends on the situation and the individuals involved, as well as others who can see or hear them. Just as a traffic light changes from yellow to red, if this behavior is repeated, especially after being told it is not appropriate, it becomes red zone behavior and is definitely unacceptable" (p. 5). The behaviors considered in the present study were chosen from the USMC material and are listed in Table 2 under Red, Yellow, or Green Zone.

The full scenarios were adapted from the scenarios developed by Terpstra and Baker (1987) based upon actual sexual harassment cases (see Baker, Terpstra, & Larntz, 1990, for a list of their scenarios). The Terpstra and Baker scenarios were chosen for this study because they are specific descriptions of behaviors that cover a variety of sexual harassment situations. Scenarios were selected that depicted behaviors likely to occur in a Navy environment. The scenarios were then modified so that, in most cases, the target was a female petty officer, and the initiator was either a male petty officer or a male chief petty officer, depending upon who was more logical for the behavior being considered (i.e., a proposition with promise of a reward is more likely to come from a higher status person, but crude gestures are more likely to come from a peer). The Appendix contains the scenarios.

Most of the behaviors chosen for the instrument were from the Yellow Zone because these are the most ambiguous, and are the most prevalent forms of sexual harassment. The pretest of an early version of the questionnaire showed that participants unambiguously viewed severe Red Zone behaviors (such as propositioning someone using threats) as sexual harassment. Two Green Zone behaviors and several Red Zone behaviors were included in the final questionnaire as "anchors."

Two of the 16 scenarios portrayed behaviors that would not typically be considered sexual harassment: a male chief patting a female petty officer on the back as he congratulates her for receiving an award, and a male chief counseling a female petty officer with the door to his office closed. The other 14 scenarios depicted behaviors that the Navy would consider sexual harassment (Commander A. Painter, personal communication of 12 April 1993). In 10 harassment stories, the harasser is male and the victim is female.<sup>1</sup> Four harassment stories were created in two versions: one version had a male perpetrator with a female victim and the other had a female perpetrator with

**Table 2**  
**Scenario Behaviors**

---

**RED ZONE**

- Proposition (reward)
- Proposition (no consequence)
- Sexual remarks (directed)

**YELLOW ZONE**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expression of sexual desire (game)</li> <li>• Obscene gestures (directed)</li> <li>• Wolf whistles</li> <li>• Coarse language</li> <li>• Staring</li> <li>• Suggestive calendar</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwanted touching</li> <li>• Persistent requests for dates</li> <li>• Dirty jokes</li> <li>• Questions about personal life</li> <li>• Obscene gestures (not directed)</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

**GREEN ZONE**

- Performance counseling
  - Congratulatory pat on back
- 

a male victim. Each participant received two of the four scenarios with female perpetrators. To summarize, 2 scenarios portrayed behaviors that were not sexual harassment, 10 harassment scenarios always described a man harassing a woman, and 4 harassment scenarios were created in a male harasser/female victim version and a female harasser/male victim version (each participant received two scenarios with a female harasser and male victim).

The 16 scenarios appeared in random order within each questionnaire. After reading each scenario, respondents made a series of judgments about the seriousness of the described behavior, whether they thought it would affect the work environment, whether they thought the situation would create a hostile work environment, whether it was sexual harassment,<sup>2,3</sup> and whether the Navy would consider the behavior sexual harassment. Table 3 presents the women's version of the scales, with changes for the men's version in parentheses.

---

<sup>1</sup>Most of the scenarios had a male harassing a female because most sexual harassment is directed toward women by men (Culbertson et al., 1993; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>Instructions on the questionnaire cover stated "When you are asked to rate something from **your perspective**, please give **your own opinion**. In these cases, it is important that you indicate how you feel about the situation, not what you think the Navy would consider a 'correct response.' "

<sup>3</sup>In prior work using Terpstra and Baker scenarios, study participants were asked whether the behavior illustrated in each scenario was sexual harassment, to which they responded "Yes" or "No." The present study was the first attempt to use a series of Likert-type scales with the scenarios.

**Table 3**

**Sexual Harassment Scales: Women's (Men's) Version**

---

**1. From you own perspective, how serious is the behavior described in this story?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Not at all			Slightly		Moderately			Highly			Extremely			
Serious			Serious		Serious			Serious			Serious			

**2. Now try to take the perspective of a man (woman). From the perspective of an "average" man (woman), how serious is the behavior described in this story?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Not at all			Slightly		Moderately			Highly			Extremely			
Serious			Serious		Serious			Serious			Serious			

**3. To what extent do you agree with these statements? Using the following scale, circle the number to the right of each item that best represents your opinion.**

	1		2		3		4		5		6
	Strongly		Disagree		Slightly		Slightly		Agree		Strongly
	Disagree				Disagree		Agree				Agree

**a. The situation described in the story would interfere with the petty officer's work performance.**

1    2    3    4    5    6

**b. The situation described in the story would create a hostile work environment.**

1    2    3    4    5    6

**c. From my perspective, the situation described in the story is sexual harassment.**

1    2    3    4    5    6

**d. From the perspective of an "average" man (woman), the situation described in the story is sexual harassment.**

1    2    3    4    5    6

**4. From the Navy's perspective, is the situation described in the story sexual harassment?**

0 No

1 Yes

---

The seriousness scale was adapted from a measure developed by Hunter and McClelland (1991), with modifications to the scale labels to make them easier to read. The seriousness scale ranged from 0 (not at all serious) to 14 (extremely serious). The questions assessing whether the situation would interfere with work performance or create a hostile environment were taken from a study by Lee and Heppner (1991). These researchers used the questions to measure sensitivity to sexual harassment. Responses to the work performance, hostile environment, and sexual harassment scales ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Two questions asking participants to take the view of an "average" person of the opposite sex were included as a measure of perceptions of others' sensitivity to sexual harassment.

Besides the scales discussed above, demographic information, some attitudinal data, and information about the workplace gender mix were collected. Results for these variables will be reported in another paper.

## **Procedure**

Questionnaires were administered in groups of 25 to 50 people. Each group contained personnel who were either in paygrades E-4 and below or E-5 and above.

After all participants had completed the questionnaire, randomly chosen personnel participated in focus groups. An average of 10 men and 10 women were chosen for each focus group session; in total, about 70 women and 70 men participated in this phase of the study. Focus groups were conducted separately for men and for women; the men's groups were conducted by a male psychologist and the women's groups were conducted by a female psychologist. In addition, most of the women's groups were attended by a second female researcher to assist with recording participant comments.

The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain more in-depth information about participants' reactions and attitudes than could be accomplished by the questionnaire. Discussion began by asking focus group participants whether the behavior depicted in a scenario was sexual harassment. They then were asked to give reasons for their answers. They also were asked whether people they knew of the opposite sex would think the behaviors were sexual harassing. If there was time, a discussion followed about whether the behaviors would be sexual harassment if they occurred in a social setting, such as at an on-base club. While the men's focus groups usually completed discussing all scenarios, the women often had so much to say that only half the scenarios were discussed. Information gathered from the focus groups will be integrated into the discussion of questionnaire findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

For each scenario, means were calculated for the seriousness, work performance interference, and hostile environment scales, and for participants' ratings of whether the scenario behavior was sexual harassment. These means were computed for women and men separately, and for the total sample. In addition, the percentages of women and men who considered each scenario to be an example of sexual harassment were calculated. Gender differences were analyzed through four multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA), one for each scenario scale (seriousness, work performance, hostile environment, and sexual harassment). In each MANOVA, sex of participant served as the independent variable (IV) and scale scores for 12 of the 16 scenarios were the multiple dependent variables (DVs).<sup>4</sup> In this way, gender effects could be tested for all scenarios simultaneously. If the overall MANOVA was significant, univariate tests were computed for each scenario to identify which scenarios demonstrated significant gender differences. Because of the large number of comparisons conducted, a .01 level of significance was adopted for all statistical tests.

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<sup>4</sup>In all MANOVAs, only the 12 one-version scenarios (i.e., for which all participants rated the behavior of a male harasser) were used as DVs. The 4 two-version scenarios (half with a male harasser, half with a female harasser) were analyzed separately.

The first section of the results focuses on scenarios involving male harassers. The analysis of gender differences in seriousness ratings and sexual harassment ratings will be followed by a discussion of women's estimates of men's ratings, and men's estimates of women's ratings. Comparisons of two-version scenarios (those scenarios that appeared in some questionnaires with a male harasser and female victim, and in other questionnaires with a female harasser and male victim) will then be made. This section will conclude with a discussion of additional information obtained from the focus groups.

## **Male Harasser**

### **How Serious is the Behavior?**

Table 4 presents the mean seriousness ratings of each scenario for women and men in the sample. Two types of ratings appear: self ratings (ratings from one's own perspective), and ratings from the perspective of an "average" person of the opposite sex. The following section will discuss the self ratings while a later section will consider the opposite sex ratings. The behaviors are listed from most serious to least serious using the women's and men's combined mean (total) self ratings.

As Table 4 shows, all of the behaviors involving a male harasser except the two non-harassment scenarios (counseling and congratulations) were considered at least moderately serious by both women and men. There is a considerable gap in the seriousness self ratings for the performance counseling scenario (considered less than slightly serious) and for the next most serious scenario, the suggestive calendar (rated as moderately serious). For both men and women, the most serious scenario involved a chief propositioning a petty officer with the suggestion of a reward for her compliance. This was seen as extremely serious behavior. Sexual remarks and obscene gestures directed at a specific woman, a chief propositioning a petty officer with no consequence for refusal, and unwanted touching were all viewed as highly serious behaviors. Women also considered a game of repeatedly expressing sexual desire for someone who is not interested highly serious behavior. Men's mean ratings for wolf whistles and repeated expressions of sexual desire approached highly serious. Dirty jokes, coarse language, personal questions, obscene gestures not directed to a particular person, staring, and suggestive pictures were considered moderately serious by both women and men.

A MANOVA was conducted using the seriousness self ratings as DVs and gender as the IV. Overall, women rated these scenarios as more serious than did men,  $F(12, 314) = 2.32, p < .01$ . *T*-tests were then performed comparing women's and men's mean seriousness self ratings for each scenario. No significant differences at the .01 level were obtained. Therefore, although there was an overall gender difference in seriousness ratings, significant differences did not surface for individual scenarios. While the mean differences in men's and women's ratings for the individual scenarios were small, women consistently had higher ratings, leading to a significant difference in seriousness self ratings overall.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>As the results of this study are considered, it is important to acknowledge that, while the questionnaires that the male and female participants completed were essentially the same instruments, the women and men were actually engaging in different tasks. The vast majority of the scenarios had a man as the behavior initiator, and a woman as the target. It is likely that the female participants provided ratings from the perspective of a potential or actual victim of the scenario situations. Men, on the other hand, were likely to view the scenarios from the perspective of someone empathizing with the victim or as a perpetrator of such behavior. These differences in tasks were very apparent in the focus groups, where women became engaged in telling their own harassment "stories," while men viewed the scenarios from the "outside."



**Table 4**  
**Mean Seriousness Ratings by Gender: Male Harasser**

Behavior	Mean Seriousness Ratings				
	Total Sample Self Ratings	Women (N = 159)		Men (N = 188)	
		Self	Average Man	Self	Average Woman
Proposition (reward) - male*	13.0	13.3	8.9	12.9	13.4
Proposition (no consequence) - male*	11.6	11.2	6.0	11.9	12.5
Obscene gestures (directed)	11.4	11.3	5.6	11.5	12.4
Sexual remarks (directed)	11.2	11.4	5.5	11.0	11.9
Unwanted touching	10.9	10.5	5.3	11.2	12.0
Expressing sexual desire (game)	9.8	10.0	4.9	9.6	10.8
Wolf whistles	9.3	9.1	3.6	9.6	10.5
Persistent requests for dates	9.3	9.5	4.4	9.2	10.3
Coarse language	8.7	8.8	3.8	8.6	9.9
Dirty jokes	8.6	8.9	3.5	8.4	9.7
Questions about personal life - male*	7.9	7.9	4.0	7.9	8.9
General obscene gestures	7.1	7.3	3.2	7.0	8.6
Staring - male*	6.9	7.3	3.4	6.6	8.9
Suggestive calendar	6.7	7.3	2.6	6.3	8.2
Counseling	2.3	2.1	1.3	2.5	3.4
Congratulations	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	1.5

Note. The seriousness scale ranged from 0 (not at all serious) to 14 (extremely serious).

\*Approximately half of the participants completed this version of the scenario.

### **Is the Behavior Sexual Harassment?**

Individual perceptions about what constitutes sexual harassment may lead someone to view a behavior as serious or inappropriate for the workplace but not label the behavior "sexual harassment." Table 5 shows participants' ratings of the extent to which they agreed with the statement: "From my perspective, the situation described in the story is sexual harassment." They also were asked to take the perspective of an "average" person of the opposite sex. The behaviors are listed in the same order as in the previous table. The ratings of sexual harassment generally followed the rank order of behaviors by seriousness rating.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The correlation between ratings of seriousness and sexual harassment ranged from .57 for directed obscene gestures to .72 for suggestive calendar.

**Table 5**  
**Mean Sexual Harassment Ratings by Gender: Male Harasser**

Behavior	Mean Harassment Ratings				
	Total Sample Self Ratings	Women (N = 159)		Men (N = 188)	
		Self	Average Man	Self	Average Woman
Proposition (reward) - male*	5.8	5.9	4.3	5.8	5.9
Proposition (no consequence) - male*	5.4	5.4	3.7	5.4	5.5
Obscene gestures (directed)	5.3	5.4	3.4	5.3	5.5
Sexual remarks (directed)	5.2	5.3	3.4	5.1	5.4
Unwanted touching	5.0	4.9	3.1	5.1	5.4
Expressing sexual desire (game)	4.8	4.8	3.0	4.7	5.1
Wolf whistles	4.7	4.8	2.7	4.6	5.0
Persistent requests for dates	4.5	4.6	2.7	4.4	4.8
Coarse language	3.9	4.0	2.5	3.8	4.5
Dirty jokes	3.8	3.9	2.5	3.7	4.5
Questions about personal life - male*	3.4	3.6	2.5	3.3	3.9
General obscene gestures	3.3	3.5	2.2	3.1	4.1
Staring - male*	3.6	3.6	2.4	3.5	4.4
Suggestive calendar	3.1	3.4	2.0	2.8	3.7
Counseling	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	2.0
Congratulations	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.7

*Note.* The sexual harassment scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

\*Approximately half of the participants completed this version of the scenario.

A MANOVA was conducted with sexual harassment self ratings as the DVs and gender as the IV. Women's ratings were significantly higher than men's ratings,  $F(12, 316) = 2.25, p = .01$ . Univariate tests indicated that men's and women's sexual harassment ratings for directed sexual remarks were significantly different,  $t(342) = 3.48, p < .01$ , with women more likely to view this behavior as sexual harassment than men. A significant gender difference in sexual harassment ratings was also found for the suggestive calendar,  $t(340) = 2.92, p < .01$ , again with women more likely to view this behavior as sexual harassment. No other significant gender differences were found for sexual harassment self ratings of individual scenarios.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The overall gender differences for seriousness and sexual harassment self ratings support prior attribution and perception research on sexual harassment. However, the lack of gender differences for most individual scenarios confirms the work of Terpstra and Baker (1987) and Baker, Terpstra, and Cutler (1990). The results of the present study suggest that gender differences are small, but consistent.

These data can be presented in another way. Table 6 shows the percentages of women and men who agreed that each behavior was an example of sexual harassment (i.e., who rated the statement as a 5, agree, or a 6, strongly agree), and the percentage who believed the Navy would define the behavior as sexual harassment.

**Table 6**

**Is Behavior Sexual Harassment?: Male Harasser**

Behavior	Percent Agree Behavior is Sexual Harassment					
	Total Sample		Women (N = 159)		Men (N = 188)	
	Self	Navy	Self	Navy	Self	Navy
Proposition (reward) - male*	98	99	96	99	99	99
Proposition (no consequence) - male*	96	84	92	86	99	85
Obscene gestures (directed)	85	94	85	93	85	94
Sexual remarks (directed)	79	91	80	91	78	92
Unwanted touching	74	92	69	89	80	95
Expressing sexual desire (game)	69	89	70	89	68	90
Wolf whistles	66	88	67	89	64	88
Persistent requests for dates	58	75	58	76	58	75
Coarse language	40	68	45	67	37	70
Dirty jokes	39	68	42	66	36	70
Questions about personal life - male*	30	50	32	52	28	48
General obscene gestures	28	61	30	63	26	60
Staring - male*	34	48	39	46	36	49
Suggestive calendar	23	57	29	60	18	55
Counseling	3	9	3	10	3	8
Congratulations	1	8	1	8	1	9

Note. The sexual harassment scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

\*Approximately half of the participants completed this version of the scenario.

Propositions, directed obscene gestures, and directed sexual remarks were seen as sexually harassing by over 75% of personnel. A smaller majority of personnel considered repeated expressions of sexual desire, wolf whistles, and persistent requests for dates to be sexual harassment. Less than half the sample viewed coarse language, dirty jokes, questions about one's personal life, general obscene gestures, staring, and suggestive pictures as sexual harassment. As mentioned previously, similar results about mild, ambiguous behaviors have been found repeatedly in the civilian literature.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>In fact, the percentages in this study match those in Terpstra and Baker's (1987) hierarchy of sexual harassment until the wolf whistle; at this point a higher proportion of Navy personnel thought most of the rest of the behaviors were sexual harassment than did the Terpstra and Baker samples of working women and college students.

The focus groups provided some insight into the variables that enter into the perception of a behavior as sexual harassment. For example, several women in the focus groups were reluctant to call an arm around the shoulder sexual harassment, even if it was unwanted. They felt that some people were "huggers" and touched everyone with whom they came into contact; the behavior was not to be taken personally. Data gathered from the focus groups indicated that Yellow Zone behavior is most likely to be seen as sexual harassment if it is targeted at an individual woman, has happened more than once, and if the woman has voiced her objections to the behavior. Navy training stresses the importance of informing the harasser that his/her behaviors are objectionable (Department of Navy, 1993). While all of the sexual harassment scenarios stated that the woman was offended or bothered by the behavior, some did not specify that she had taken any action. Focus group participants often said that a scenario did **not** represent sexual harassment because the woman had not confronted the initiator of the behavior and had not reported the behavior to anyone in the chain of command. Therefore, many participants defined a Yellow Zone behavior as sexual harassment not by the act itself but by the victim's response to the behavior. Interestingly, in several groups the women were asked how likely they were to state objections in situations similar to the ones depicted in the scenarios. Some women voiced their objections on a daily basis. Many women admitted, however, that even if they might be willing to be assertive, they doubted many young, low paygrade women would feel comfortable asking someone to stop a sexually harassing behavior.

The focus groups also exhibited an interesting gender difference in definition that did not surface from the questionnaire. The men knew that if an action targeted a specific woman, it was sexual harassment. However, their definition of "targeted" was different from the women's definition. For example, women tended to believe that cat calls or whistles are directed at particular individuals and, therefore, are sexual harassment. The men were less likely to consider a cat call or whistle to be directed at a specific woman and viewed such behavior as part of the general environment. Therefore, they did not consider the behavior sexual harassment.

Many focus group participants (male and female) accepted actions and behaviors such as lewd jokes, foul language, and rude gestures as part of the enlisted environment. Since these behaviors are a feature of the milieu and often are not directed toward a particular individual, several participants expressed the opinion that women who were offended could leave the area. This may not be a realistic solution in many work centers. Some women labeled these behaviors as "annoying" or "harassment" but did not want to call them "sexual harassment." Senior enlisted women were more likely than junior enlisted women to understand that these behaviors might create a hostile environment.

Table 6 also shows the percentage of respondents who thought the Navy would consider the behavior depicted in each scenario to represent sexual harassment. Over 90% of the sample believed that the Navy's definition of sexual harassment covered unwanted sexual propositions, directed obscene gestures, directed sexual remarks, and touching. Between 75% and 90% of the sample believed that repeated expressions of sexual desire, wolf whistles, and persistent requests for dates were considered sexual harassment by the Navy.

Less agreement was shown for the mild, ambiguous behaviors such as leering and general obscene gestures. Despite the fact that each behavior in this category **does** fall under the Navy

definition of sexual harassment, 30% to 50% of the sample said that the Navy would **not** consider these behaviors sexually harassing.

Agreement with their perception of the Navy definition of sexual harassment can be assessed by comparing participants' self percentages to their Navy percentages for each behavior. Self percentages were lower in almost all cases, but the discrepancies were greatest for the most ambiguous (and mildest) behaviors, such as dirty jokes, general obscene gestures, and suggestive calendar. Many participants, therefore, do not agree with what they perceive to be the Navy's categorization of these behaviors as sexual harassment.

### **Estimation of Opposite Sex Ratings**

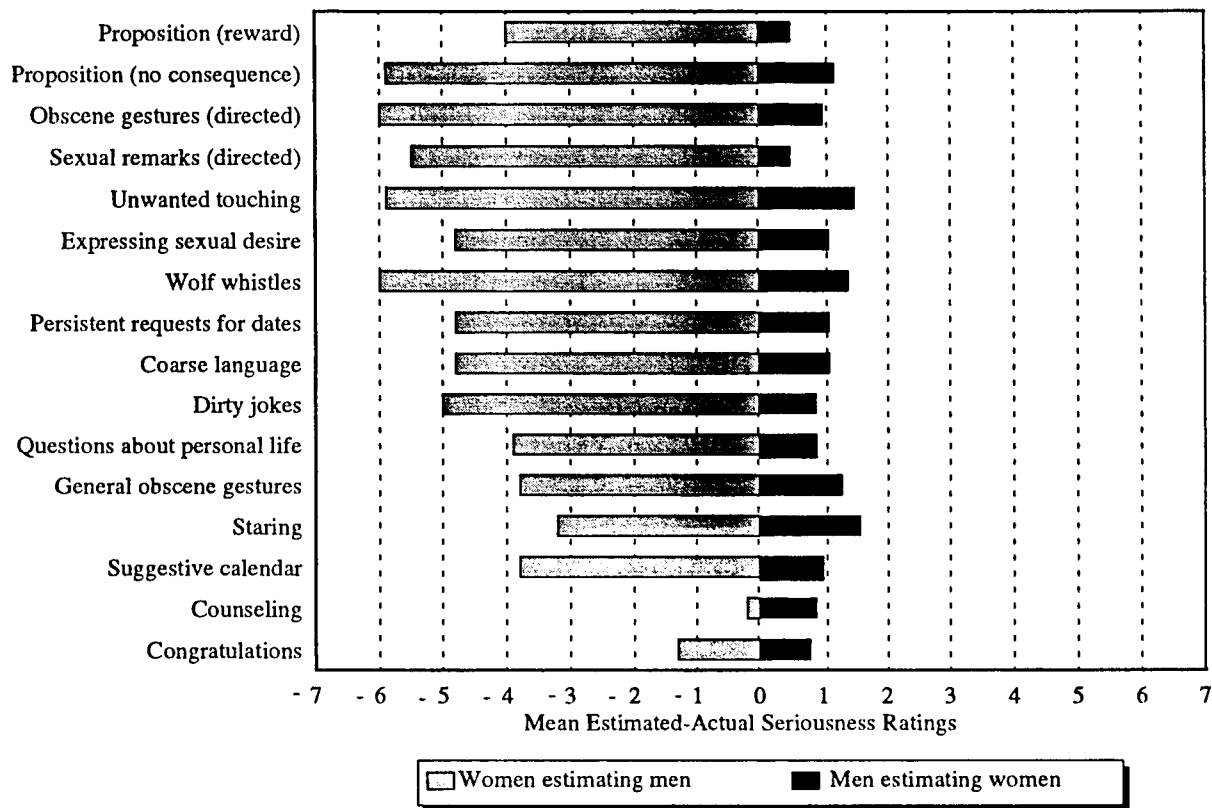
A particularly interesting finding of this study concerns women's estimations of men's ratings, and men's estimations of women's ratings. Women were asked to take the perspective of an "average man" and then complete the seriousness and sexual harassment questions. Men were asked to do the same thing, taking the perspective of an "average woman." Mean opposite sex estimated ratings are listed in Table 4.

A MANOVA comparing women's opposite sex estimates to men's self ratings showed that **women significantly underestimated men's ratings**,  $F(12, 314) = 30.86, p < .001$ . Univariate tests indicated that the only scenario **not** demonstrating a significant difference was the congratulations scenario; all other scenarios were significant at the .001 level. Although men's estimates of women's ratings were more accurate, a MANOVA also yielded a significant difference over all scenarios,  $F(12, 314) = 3.29, p < .001$ , with **men significantly overestimating women's ratings**. *T*-tests comparing actual and opposite sex ratings for the 16 scenarios found 10 significant differences at the .01 level for the following behaviors: proposition, no consequence; directed obscene gestures; unwanted touching; expressing sexual desire; wolf whistle; coarse language; general obscene gestures; staring; counseling; and congratulations.

The degree of women's underestimations and men's overestimations can best be appreciated if shown graphically. For each behavior, the **actual** mean rating of the opposite sex was subtracted from the mean **estimated** rating, e.g., the men's mean seriousness rating was subtracted from the women's estimate of the men's seriousness rating. Figure 1 presents the mean differences for the seriousness ratings.

Two striking patterns emerge. Men tended to overestimate women's ratings of seriousness by between 0.5 and about 1.5 scale points; this means that men believed women would rate the behaviors as more serious than the women actually did. Women, however, consistently **underestimated** men's ratings, by small amounts for the nonharassing behaviors, but by large amounts for other behaviors. Women believed that men would rate the behaviors as **less serious** than the men actually did. More specifically, women believed men would rate certain behaviors as less than moderately serious when, in fact, the men actually rated these behaviors as highly serious.

Results for sexual harassment ratings (see Table 5) were similar to those of the seriousness ratings. Women significantly underestimated men's sexual harassment ratings,  $F(12, 314) = 26.08, p < .001$ . All individual scenarios except counseling and congratulations demonstrated a significant



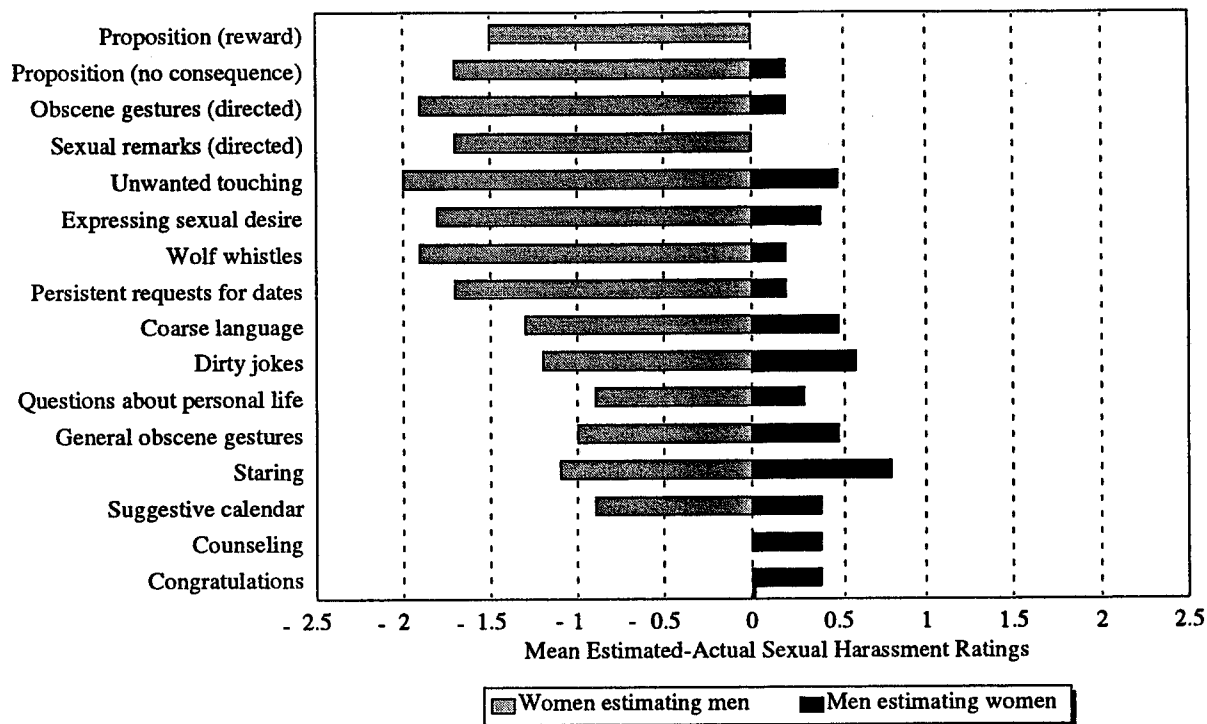
**Figure 1. Mean differences in seriousness ratings.**

difference at the .001 level. Overall, men significantly overestimated women's sexual harassment ratings,  $F(12, 316) = 3.15, p < .001$ . Seven scenarios showed significant differences, all at the .001 level: unwanted touching, coarse language, dirty jokes, general obscene gestures, staring, counseling, and congratulations.

Figure 2 presents graphically the differences between estimated and actual sexual harassment ratings for women and men.

Men accurately estimated women's sexual harassment ratings of the most serious behaviors, and women accurately estimated men's ratings of the nonharassing behaviors. However, men's overestimates of the women's ratings for the other behaviors ranged between 0.2 and 0.8 points (out of 6 scale points), while women underestimated men's ratings by up to 2 scale points.

The men's and women's errors in estimation are supported by information gathered through the focus groups. Many men expressed the view that women were likely to see **everything** as sexual harassment. While this opinion became less broad-based as the scenarios were explored (especially for the ambiguous behaviors), there was general agreement among the men that most women would find most of the behaviors sexually harassing. Many women, on the other hand, expressed the opinion that men would **not** find most of the behaviors sexually harassing. Most women agreed that men would consider the two proposition scenarios to represent sexual harassment but, in general, the women thought men would not take the other behaviors seriously.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2. Mean differences in sexual harassment ratings.**

These findings bring up interesting questions. Men's ratings of seriousness and sexual harassment were, usually, lower than those of women, but these rating differences were small. Yet, women consistently underestimated men's ratings to a high degree. Does this mean that men are more sensitive to the issues than women give them credit for? Or is this evidence that men "know" the correct responses, but women's ratings reflect the fact that men are not putting this knowledge into practice? This study cannot answer these questions. However, the focus groups did provide some evidence that sexually harassing behaviors, especially mild forms, are common in Navy work centers. Men often took for granted that sexual joking was a part of their work environment. A few men admitted that they sometimes engaged in crude behavior or talk just to get a reaction out of a female coworker. Many women discussed the daily comments about their bodies and the frequent rude gestures and lewd jokes made by men toward women. Many of the women reported that even blatant forms of harassment, such as sexual propositions, were not uncommon; most women knew of someone, if not herself, who had experienced these behaviors (although some women remarked that these serious situations were not happening as often as before Tailhook).

<sup>9</sup>There is no civilian literature with which to compare these error of estimation findings. However, Gutek (1985) did report that men thought women would be complimented and flattered by sexual advances from a man, particularly from an attractive man. However, most of the women in her sample said that they would find such advances insulting. In Gutek's sample, therefore, the men were **not** sensitive to women's feelings on the subject. Gutek explains that perhaps because men are complimented and flattered by women's advances (the sample men admitted this and the sample women knew men felt this way), men would also expect women to be complimented by men's advances. An unexpected finding in Gutek's study was that the women, although reporting that they personally would be insulted by men's advances, believed that **other** women would be complimented and flattered!

It is important to stress that half the women in the sample were from sea-intensive ratings, a much higher percentage than for women in the Navy as a whole. Most of these women were in traditionally male ratings and were often one of very few women (or the only woman) in their work centers. Therefore, their experiences may not typify the experiences of women in shore-intensive ratings, where the gender balance is not as skewed.

### **Work Performance/Hostile Environment**

Two scales were included in the questionnaire assessing agreement with statements that the scenario behaviors would interfere with work performance or create a hostile work environment. These items were considered measures of sensitivity to sexual harassment, without mentioning the term "sexual harassment." Table 7 presents the means for men and women on these two variables.

**Table 7**  
**Mean Ratings of Interference With Work Performance and Creation of**  
**Hostile Environment by Gender: Male Harasser**

Behavior	Mean Ratings			
	The Situation Described in the Story Would:			
	Interfere With Work Performance		Create Hostile Environment	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Proposition (reward) - male*	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.6
Proposition (no consequence) - male*	5.5	5.4	5.3	5.4
Obscene gestures (directed)	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.3
Sexual remarks (directed)	5.5	5.3	5.5	5.2
Unwanted touching	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.0
Expressing sexual desire (game)	4.9	4.7	4.8	4.6
Wolf whistles	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.4
Persistent requests for dates	5.0	4.8	4.8	4.7
Coarse language	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.2
Dirty jokes	4.3	4.1	4.5	4.2
Questions about personal life - male*	4.0	3.9	4.1	4.0
General obscene gestures	4.1	3.8	4.1	3.8
Staring - male*	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.1
Suggestive calendar	4.0	3.7	4.1	3.5
Counseling	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.0
Congratulations	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.3

Note. The work performance and hostile environment scales ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

\*Approximately half of the participants completed this version of the scenario.



While the ranked order of the work performance interference and hostile environment ratings are similar to the seriousness and sexual harassment ratings, two behaviors seem clearly out of order, especially for women: persistent requests for dates and staring. It appears that these two behaviors, while not the most serious, have the potential of interfering with an individual's work performance and creating a hostile environment to a greater degree than other Yellow Zone behaviors.

MANOVAs analyzing gender differences over all scenarios in work performance and hostile environment ratings were not significant. Therefore, no univariate comparisons were made.

The work performance and hostile work environment items also provided information about whether the willingness to label a behavior "sexual harassment" was associated with the belief that the behavior significantly affects the work environment.<sup>10</sup> In order to compare men's and women's ratings of whether or not a behavior constituted sexual harassment (sexual harassment self ratings presented in Table 5) with the ratings of work performance interference and hostile environment (found in Table 7), two within-subjects MANOVAs, one for women and one for men, were calculated. DVs for these MANOVAs were 12 scenario ratings of work performance interference and the corresponding 12 scenario ratings of hostile environment, and 12 scenario ratings of sexual harassment. Both MANOVAs were significant (men,  $F(24, 147) = 9.74, p < .001$ ; women,  $F(24, 126) = 7.60, p < .001$ ) indicating that when the 12 scenarios were considered simultaneously, participants rated the work performance interference, hostile environment, and sexual harassment scales differently. In order to determine which scenarios and ratings contributed to overall significance, one-way repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run for each scenario using the scenario ratings of work performance interference, hostile environment, and sexual harassment as the DVs. These ANOVAs were computed for women and men separately.

For ANOVAs that were significant at the .01 level, simple contrasts were computed between work performance interference and sexual harassment and between hostile environment and sexual harassment. Table 8 summarizes the contrasts that were significant at the .01 level.

For most behaviors, men and women rated the sexual harassment scale significantly lower than either the work performance interference or hostile environment scales. These findings suggest that the work environment can be affected by behaviors that participants were reluctant to label as sexual harassment.<sup>11</sup> This effect was found primarily for Yellow Zone behaviors; the only exception was wolf whistles, which were more likely to be seen as sexually harassing than as having an effect on a woman's work environment.

An example from one focus group illustrates that women may be affected by the mild, ambiguous behaviors they do not label as sexual harassment. In this focus group, senior enlisted women described how prevalent jokes, whistles, gestures, and remarks were in their various environments, explaining that they had become accustomed to such behavior. One woman then proudly reported that such behaviors **did not** occur in her work center; her coworkers acted like

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<sup>10</sup>Correlations between the work performance and sexual harassment scales ranged from .58 for wolf whistles to .79 for proposition with reward. Correlations for the hostile environment and sexual harassment scales ranged from .61 for proposition with reward to .88 for congratulatory pat on the back.

<sup>11</sup>This effect was especially dramatic for the staring scenario. In this case, 74% of the women thought that a man staring at and "looking over" a woman would interfere with work performance, and 51% believed such behavior would create a hostile work environment. But, only 39% of the women believed that staring constituted sexual harassment.

Table 8

**Summary of ANOVA Contrasts for Work Performance, Hostile Environment, and Sexual Harassment Scales: Male Harasser**

Behavior	Women	Men
Proposition (reward) - male*		
Proposition (no consequence) - male*		
Obscene gestures (directed)		
Sexual remarks (directed)	HE > SH	WP > SH
Unwanted touching	WP > SH	
Expressing sexual desire (game)		
Wolf whistles	SH > WP	SH > WP, HE
Persistent requests for dates	WP, HE > SH	WP, HE > SH
Coarse language	WP, HE > SH	
Dirty jokes	HE > SH	HE > SH
Questions about personal life - male*	HE > SH	WP, HE > SH
General obscene gestures	WP, HE > SH	WP, HE > SH
Staring - male*	WP, HE > SH	WP, HE > SH
Suggestive calendar	WP, HE > SH	WP, HE > SH
Counseling	WP, HE > SH	WP, HE > SH
Congratulations		WP > SH

**Notes.** 1. ANOVA = Analysis of variance, WP = Interfere with work performance, HE = Create hostile environment, SH = Sexual harassment.

2. The following examples will describe how the table should be read. Significant differences were not found between work performance interference and sexual harassment, or hostile environment and sexual harassment for the two proposition scenarios or for directed obscene gestures. For directed sexual remarks, women's ratings of hostile environment were significantly higher than their ratings for sexual harassment while men's ratings of work performance interference were significantly higher than their ratings of sexual harassment.

3. All contrasts were significant at the .01 level.

\*Approximately half of the participants completed this version of the scenario.

professionals. Several other women quickly asked where this woman worked, displaying a mixture of envy and disbelief in their tone.

### **Male Versus Female Harasser**

Four of the scenarios (proposition with promise of a reward, proposition with no consequence, questions about personal life, and staring) were created in two forms: male harasser-female victim, and female harasser-male victim. The purpose of these two forms was to examine whether gender of the harasser influenced perceptions about level of seriousness and perceptions of whether the

behavior was considered sexual harassment. Each subject received one serious and one mild scenario with a male harasser and a female victim, and one serious and one mild scenario with a female harasser and a male victim. Table 9 presents mean ratings for seriousness and sexual harassment for the two versions of each scenario.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 9**  
**Mean Ratings by Gender: Male Versus Female Harasser**

Behavior	Mean Ratings			
	Seriousness		Sexual Harassment	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Proposition (reward) - male harasser	13.3	12.9	5.9	5.8
Proposition (reward) - female harasser	13.1	12.0	5.7	5.5
Proposition (no consequence) - male harasser	11.2	11.9	5.4	5.4
Proposition (no consequence) - female harasser	12.3	10.3	5.6	5.0
Questions about personal life - male harasser	7.9	7.9	4.0	3.1
Questions about personal life - female harasser	7.9	6.4	3.6	3.3
Staring - male harasser	7.3	6.6	3.6	3.5
Staring - female harasser	6.6	5.2	3.8	2.8

**Notes.** 1. Approximately half of the participants completed each version of the scenario.

2. The seriousness scale ranged from 0 (not at all serious) to 14 (extremely serious).

3. The sexual harassment scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

ANOVAs were performed on seriousness and sexual harassment ratings, with gender of participant and gender of harasser as the two IVs. All but one of the ANOVAs produced significant effects.

Ratings of seriousness will be considered first. For proposition with a reward, women participants rated the scenarios as more serious than did men,  $F(1, 340) = 8.86, p < .01$ . The proposition with no consequence scenario produced an interesting interaction effect for seriousness ratings,  $F(3, 342) = 17.92, p < .001$ . Women viewed the version with a female harasser and a male victim as more serious than the version with a male harasser and a female victim. For men, the behavior of a male harasser with a female victim was seen as more serious than the same behavior coming from a female harasser with a male victim. Staring was viewed as more serious by women participants than by men participants,  $F(1, 342) = 6.644, p < .01$ . Respondents regarded the staring scenario with a male perpetrator as more serious than the version with a female perpetrator,  $F(1, 342) = 7.11, p < .01$ .

<sup>12</sup>Work performance and hostile work environment ratings were also collected but do not add any new information to this discussion, and will not be considered in this paper.

In all cases, men's seriousness ratings for scenarios with male harassers were higher than for the same scenarios with female harassers. For women, gender of harasser had no consistent effect.

Sexual harassment ratings for the proposition with reward scenario showed a significant version effect,  $F(1, 342) = 7.37, p < .01$ . This scenario with a male perpetrator was more likely to be rated as sexually harassing than was the same scenario with a female harasser. Women's sexual harassment ratings for the proposition with no consequence scenario were significantly higher than men's,  $F(1, 340) = 6.96, p < .01$ . As with the corresponding seriousness ratings, women rated the female perpetrator scenario as more sexually harassing while men rated the male perpetrator version as more harassing,  $F(3, 340) = 9.33, p < .01$ .

Women viewed the questions about personal life scenario as more sexually harassing than did men,  $F(1, 339) = 11.13, p < .001$ . Finally, women's sexual harassment ratings for the staring scenario were significantly higher than men's,  $F(1, 339) = 10.79, p < .001$ . A significant interaction was also found: women participants rated the female perpetrator version of the staring scenario as more harassing than the male perpetrator version, while men rated the male perpetrator version as more harassing than the female perpetrator version,  $F(3, 339) = 6.47, p < .01$ .

In general, men tended to view a behavior as more serious and sexually harassing when exhibited by a male toward a female victim. Some focus groups considered the question of how men would react if they were harassed by a woman. Some women said that they believed men would not consider a situation offensive if a woman was the harasser and a man was a victim. The women seemed to believe that men are flattered by such attention. In fact, several men in focus groups said that they would consider acting on a proposition by a woman if she were attractive. Some men considered the scenarios in which a woman propositions a man to be a joke, asking what was wrong with him -- why didn't he go for it! These results support Gutek's (1985) findings that most men and women agree that men would find a woman's advances flattering.

### **Other Focus Group Findings**

Two additional focus group findings are worth noting because they point to areas that the Navy may wish to address in the future.

#### **Sexual Harassment in Social Settings**

Some focus group participants were asked whether the behavior described in each scenario would be sexual harassment if it occurred outside the workplace; for example, in an on-base club. Because the women's groups tended to become more involved with other questions, discussions about sexual harassment in social settings occurred mainly within the men's groups. Men considered many behaviors inappropriate in the workplace but almost any behavior was acceptable at a club. The remarks of one petty officer stand out. He cited the sexual harassment regulations from memory and lectured the younger sailors on the inappropriateness of their attitudes about workplace sexual harassment. But for most behaviors, particularly the more ambiguous ones, he said repeatedly, "Save it for the club."

## Women's Perceptions of How Men View Women

Many E-5 and above women who participated in focus groups reported that their male coworkers often expressed negative attitudes about Navy women.<sup>13</sup> For example, some said that enlisted men placed single Navy women into one of two general categories: whores or lesbians. These women felt that Navy men considered women to be second-class citizens. While personal sexual activity was an appropriate topic of discussion for men, women were placed in a double-bind. They felt that if they did not discuss sexual matters with their male coworkers, they would be ostracized (or called a lesbian), yet if they did talk about their sex lives, they would be thought of as whores.

This is not to say that E-5 and above men were constantly discussing their sex lives! The more blatant examples of negative attitudes toward women described above seemed to occur among young male sailors. However, as the women progressed in their careers, they became more aware of gender discrimination in its various forms and they were able to verbalize how such discrimination related to attitudes toward Navy women.

To complicate the situation, some women felt that their male colleagues were punishing them for the Navy's sensitivity to sexual harassment. Some women said they felt segregated when a male coworker made a point of asking them if it was "all right" to swear or tell a joke. In addition, women reported that some men would not socialize with women at all or would only do so in a tense manner. The extreme sensitivity of this issue was often displayed in reaction to the counseling scenario. Many focus group participants (men and women) said that, while this scenario **did not** represent sexual harassment, the male chief would be foolish to counsel a woman behind closed doors without a witness.<sup>14</sup>

The focus groups highlighted a problem faced by women in the Navy and, perhaps, by many women who work in male-dominated environments. The women, especially the young women, wanted to fit into the Navy culture. The result was that they would swear "like sailors" and discuss their sex lives in detail, just like their male coworkers. Some mentioned that they only spoke this way while at work. But, this behavior creates a dilemma. In some Navy work centers, women often are the "butt" of jokes, comments about their bodies are made frequently, and sexual overtures, serious and in jest, are common.

Concerns expressed by women who participated in the focus groups went beyond sexual harassment and cut to the heart of how enlisted women feel they are viewed and treated by their male coworkers. Sexual harassment is, in this sense, a symptom of the larger problem of gender discrimination. The question is, can the Navy eradicate sexual harassment?

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<sup>13</sup>Such attitudes were not overtly expressed in the men's focus groups. This is not surprising. If the participants held negative beliefs and attitudes toward women, the sensitivity of the sexual harassment issue probably would have prevented them from sharing such views with strangers.

<sup>14</sup>Discussions about the appropriate way to counsel a subordinate sometimes became heated. Some participants felt strongly that privacy must be protected and, therefore, counseling behind a closed door without a witness was essential. Others believed that such a practice allows supervisors to be set up by disgruntled subordinates who will later charge sexual harassment as revenge. While very few focus group participants knew of false sexual harassment charges, many were concerned about the possibility.

Navy training focuses on providing individuals with the knowledge and skills to deal with sexual harassment situations. The new informal resolution system, detailed in *Resolving Conflict* (Department of Navy, 1993) has defined mild, ambiguous types of sexual harassment as example of conflicts between individuals. While this approach may reduce the number of formal complaints about sexual harassment and, hopefully, also reduce the incidence of these behaviors, it does not recognize that these behaviors go beyond individuals and may reflect a general attitude toward women in the Navy. To completely eradicate sexual harassment, the Navy may need to take a hard look at the larger picture of gender attitudes and gender discrimination in the Navy.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the relatively small sample size, and the concentration of female participants in jobs not traditional for women, several interesting findings arose from this study. First, the scenarios considered by the Navy to depict sexual harassment were viewed by the study participants as moderately to extremely serious behaviors and the more serious behaviors were considered sexual harassment. However, Yellow Zone behaviors, such as dirty jokes and coarse language, were generally not seen as sexual harassment, although the Navy considers these behaviors to constitute sexual harassment. These findings confirm what has been found in the civilian literature.

Second, gender differences were found in self ratings of seriousness and sexual harassment when scenarios were analyzed simultaneously. Women tended to consider the behaviors more serious than did men and women more strongly agreed that the scenarios represented examples of sexual harassment. On a practical level, the differences in men's and women's ratings were not large. Statistically, however, the consistency with which women's ratings were higher than men's ratings led to significant findings overall.

Third, men tended to **overestimate** the "average" women's ratings of the behaviors. Women, on the other hand, tended to **greatly underestimate** men's ratings. This finding indicates that men's actual ratings of seriousness and sexual harassment were considerably higher than women's estimates of these ratings.

Fourth, both men and women, but especially women, were more likely to rate scenario behaviors as interfering with work performance and creating a hostile work environment than they were to label the behaviors "sexual harassment." This finding may be related to the fact that Navy personnel are extremely sensitive to the topic of sexual harassment and wish to downplay it. At the same time they may recognize that such behaviors have a negative effect on the work environment.

Several recommendations follow from this study:

1. The Navy should continue to make clear that behaviors which create a hostile environment constitute sexual harassment.<sup>15</sup>
2. The Navy should include in sexual harassment prevention training a discussion of behaviors that occur on base but out of the work center (for example, at on-base social events), and at off-base Navy-sponsored events.

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<sup>15</sup>The Navy is continuing to revise its sexual harassment training. The connection between sexual harassment and hostile environment is covered in the current training.

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## **Appendix Scenarios**



For two version scenarios, changes for the "female harasser" version are in parentheses.

**Proposition with reward (two versions)**

Although Petty Officer Fay Cole (Greg Clements) has indicated that she is not interested, Chief Greg Clements (Fay Cole) continues to proposition her. He has hinted that her work assignments might improve if she has an affair with him.

**Proposition, no consequence (two versions)**

Chief Paul Brown (Barbara Mitchell) approaches Petty Officer Barbara Mitchell (Paul Brown) and quietly asks her if she would consider having an affair with him. It is not the first time he has asked her, even though she clearly told him at the outset that she was not interested.

**Directed obscene gestures**

As Petty Officer Darlene Nichols walks by two of her male co-workers, they once again direct obscene, sexually-oriented gestures at her. This makes her uncomfortable.

**Directed sexual remarks**

Petty Officer Mary Jones is becoming increasingly upset with the actions of her male co-workers. Their frequent, easily overheard sexual remarks about her body are beginning to wear on her.

**Unwanted touching**

Chief Mike Smith puts his arm around Petty Officer Janet Ross as he tells her about the work center's next project. She has asked him not to put his arm around her before, but he continues to do so.

**Repeated expressions of sexual desire**

Petty Officer Jack White has repeatedly expressed his sexual desire for Petty Officer Rita Gregory. Although Petty Officer Gregory knows it is only a game he frequently plays with female sailors, it still bothers her.

**Wolf whistles**

Every time Petty Officer Abby King walks by a certain work center, the men "wolf-whistle." She considers this to be offensive.

**Persistent requests for dates**

Petty Officer Amy Thomas is becoming increasingly uncomfortable around Petty Officer Steve Payne. Every time he has the opportunity, he asks her out for a date. She has told him that she is not interested, but he still persists.

**Coarse language**

Coarse language is commonplace around Petty Officer JoAnn Forest's work center. As the male sailors go about their business, they pepper their conversation with references to male and female sex organs and to sexual activity. This makes Petty Officer Jones uncomfortable.

**Dirty jokes**

As the supervisor and crew sit down for coffee during a break, Petty Officer Fred Simon leads off with his usual off-color, sex-oriented joke. Petty Officer Lisa Bridges knows that more will follow as the male sailors roar their approval. She considers the jokes to be offensive.

**Questions about personal life (two versions)**

Every Monday morning, Petty Officer John Michaels (Patricia Singer) questions Petty Officer Patricia Singer (John Michaels) about her weekend. He wants to know whether she dated anyone, with whom she had gone out, and what she did on the date. She considers the questions inappropriate and offensive.

**General obscene gestures**

It is not uncommon in her work center for Petty Officer Ellen Lee to observe her male co-workers making obscene gestures. While the gestures are not directed toward her, she still considers the actions offensive.

**Staring (two versions)**

Petty Officer Jane Briggs (Tom Edwards) is becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Petty Officer Tom Edwards (Jane Briggs), seated at the desk next to her, has been staring at her and "looking her over" for days.

**Suggestive calendar**

The male sailors in Petty Officer Virginia Tyler's work center have put up a calendar with pictures of women in very revealing swimsuits. Petty Officer Tyler finds the calendar offensive.

**Counseling**

Chief Tony Grady asks Petty Officer Liz Ford to come into his office. He closes the door and then counsels her on her work performance.

**Congratulations**

Chief Bob Nash approaches Petty Officer Beth Smith in her work center. He pats her on the back and congratulates her for being nominated as the work center sailor of the quarter.

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