

Title: The Effect of Claimant Stereotype Category and Respondent Gender on Attributions in Sexual Harassment Cases

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Abstract:

This study reviews the work on gender stereotypes of women and the disparity between men and women in evaluating sexual harassment cases. Men generally tend to be significantly less sympathetic to claims of sexual harassment than women. Utilizing both college students and workers at a male-dominated work environment, subjects were exposed to a written scenario where a woman files a complaint of sexual harassment against a coworker. They were also given a picture and description of the woman filing the claim. Subjects randomly received one of three pictures/descriptions. The pictures/descriptions confirmed previously proven stereotype clusters: a maternal stereotype, a vamp stereotype, and a career woman stereotype. Discriminant analyses showed that the three pictures/ descriptions evoked the intended stereotype category. After exposure to a picture/description of the accused male, they then read his denial of the charge. To assess the subsequent attributions of each party, the Causal Dimension Scale II was amended to allow respondents to make external, as opposed to internal, attributions. Respondents were also asked about variables of blame and responsibility. This study confirmed the oft-mentioned conclusion that women respondents put significantly more blame on the accused male than male respondents. Yet, this study also suggests that attributions are also affected by the perceived stereotype category of the accuser. A variety of significant interactions between subject sex and the perceived gender stereotype category will be reviewed. The study concludes with a strong appeal for refining our understanding of gender stereotype categories and a further appeal to integrate stereotype categories into future studies of sexual harassment.