

# Should I Confront Him? Men's Reactions to Hypothetical Confrontations of Peer Sexual Harassment

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**Abstract** This study investigated how men react to a hypothetical confrontation by a woman of a male sexual harasser. Participants were 250 male undergraduates from a Canadian university who read scenarios depicting sexual harassment that varied by type of harassment and style of confrontation. Findings suggest that men have more negative feelings and opinions of a female confronter, and would engage in more negative verbal behaviour if confronted about subtle versus overt harassment. Contrary to prediction, assertive/hostile confrontation styles were related to only limited negative reactions. Although this study found that men's reported reactions were not markedly negative, we discuss the importance of these results for women in understanding what factors may increase the chance that men will react negatively.

**Keywords** Sexual harassment · Confrontation · Reactions · Peer harassment

## Introduction

Imagine that you are participating in an activity with a person of the opposite sex. Perhaps you are at work, school, or a social function. You and your partner do not have a close social relationship but you do share many of the same acquaintances. You have always been cordial with one another. Suddenly, while working on your task, your partner makes an unwelcome sexual comment and touches you inappropriately. How do you respond? Depending on

how you react the harasser could have different thoughts, feelings, and behavioural reactions. What can you do to ensure that the behaviour stops, while also ensuring that you do not experience negative repercussions? Guided by feminist theory of the dynamics of harassment interactions and past research on confrontations of prejudicial comments, this study begins to answer this question. An experiment was designed to explore Canadian undergraduate men's reactions after reading scenarios depicting female confrontations of male sexual harassment. The type of confrontation style used and the type of sexual harassment that was confronted were varied. The impact of these factors on men's reactions was assessed.

Sexual Harassment in Canada and the U.S.

Approximately 50% of Canadian and American women will experience sexual harassment at some time in their lives (Crocker and Kalemba 1999; Fitzgerald et al. 1988; O'Connell and Korabik 2000). The number of women who experience this form of harassment is surprising given modern policies and laws about sexual harassment.

The Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canada Labour Code prohibit sexual harassment. The labour code of Canada describes sexual harassment as an "offensive or humiliating behaviour that is related to a person's sex, as well as behaviour of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, unwelcome, hostile, or offensive work environment, or that could reasonably be thought to put sexual conditions on a person's job or employment opportunities" (Canadian Human Rights Commission 2006, p. 3). This definition of sexual harassment and its framing as a rights violation is similar to the situation in the United States where sexual harassment is prohibited by the Civil Rights Act. Other sexual harassment researchers (e.g., Gruber and

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Smith 1995) have also noted the similarities between Canadian and American definitions and policies on sexual harassment.

Research has also demonstrated that the incidence of sexual harassment, the types of harassment perpetrated, and attitudes toward women in these situations are similar in Canadian and U.S. samples (Gruber 1997). When types of sexual harassment perpetrated were examined by Crocker and Kalemba (1999), they found that Canadian women experienced gender harassment most frequently (61% of the time), followed by unwanted sexual attention (in 15–25% of cases), and then sexual coercion (1–2%). Other Canadian studies have found similar rates (O’Connell and Korabik 2000). These numbers correspond closely to U.S. figures, where gender harassment is reported most (50%), unwanted sexual attention is the next most common (20–25%), and coercion is least frequent (5–10%) (Gelfand et al. 1995). A cross-cultural study conducted by Sigal and Jacobson (1999) on sexual harassment in six countries confirmed that Canadian and U.S. samples were also similar in how credible they found a female victim to be, their attitudes towards women, and their recommended punishments for perpetrators of sexual harassment.

From these findings we can conclude that sexual harassment is common in both the United States and Canada, with both countries sharing similar laws and the citizens having comparable views and attitudes towards sexual harassment. These similarities gave us confidence that study findings from both the U.S. and Canada were applicable, and thus both were used to inform this research.

### Responding to Sexual Harassment

To date, an effective method for responding to sexual harassment has yet to be found. Non-assertive strategies such as ignoring the harassment, avoiding the harasser, or making a joke of the harassment do little to stop perpetrators from engaging in this behaviour. Yet, these are the ways in which women are most likely to respond to sexual harassment (e.g., Fitzgerald et al. 1995; Swim and Hyers 1999). Another method of responding to sexual harassment is reporting it to individuals in positions of authority. Reporting harassment is frequently endorsed by organizations and educational institutions. Unfortunately, it is often ineffective and at times even dangerous (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board 1995). For example, research has revealed that some women who report workplace sexual harassment experience retaliation (Bergman et al. 2002).

Another strategy that women can use to respond to sexual harassment is confronting the harasser. There are many reasons why confronting the harasser could be an effective method for dealing with harassment. A change in the perpetrator’s prejudicial attitudes and beliefs would be

one of the most desirable outcomes that could result from a confrontation (Kaiser and Miller 2004). If changes to these long held ways of thinking are not possible however, an alternative that would still be very positive for women would be a change in the harasser’s future behaviour, regardless of their attitudes (as discussed in Czopp et al. 2006). Kaiser and Miller (2004) highlight how confronting harassment can potentially benefit women by increasing feelings of self efficacy (for standing up for themselves and being in control of their harassment experience). Confronting can also benefit society by discouraging men from harassing women, and by calling attention to this sexist and harmful behaviour.

To date, limited research has been conducted in this area, with the majority of studies focusing on women’s anticipated or actual confronting behaviour. An understanding of men’s reactions to confrontations is now needed as a first step in determining whether confronting is an effective method for responding to sexual harassment. The current study was designed to explore how men anticipate they would react if they were confronted about sexual harassment. It is our hope that future research can build upon this foundation.

### Women and Sexual Harassment Confrontations

The potential benefits of confronting harassers are numerous; why then do few women confront men who sexually harass them? Researchers who have investigated women’s perceptions of whether they would confront sexual harassers believe that it is women’s fear of experiencing negative reactions from the harasser or their workplace/school that keeps them from confronting sexual harassers. These negative reactions are often referred to as costs and include social costs such as isolation or embarrassment and being thought of negatively, as well as work specific costs such as the removal or denial of benefits, perks or promotions. Shelton and Stewart (2004) conducted a study in which the costs of confronting sexual harassment were directly manipulated in order to investigate the effect of these costs on women’s confronting behaviour. Low and high cost situations were created by having participants partake in a mock interview for either a prestigious, competitive job, or a job that would be easy to get and which was not prestigious. While being interviewed, participants were sexually harassed (or in another condition, asked offensive but not harassing questions) by the male interviewer confederate. The results of the study revealed that women in the low cost situation were more likely to confront a man who was asking sexually harassing questions (92%), than were women in the high cost situation (only 22%). Thus, the anticipation of experiencing high costs does appear to deter women from confronting

perpetrators of sexual harassment, most notably in situations which are the most important to women's lives.

Although one might assume that women recognize that the reason they do not confront men who harass them is because they are afraid of experiencing costs, research has found that women do not anticipate these feelings of fear when they contemplate whether they would confront a perpetrator. Woodzicka and LaFrance (2001) investigated women's decisions to confront sexual harassers in either imagined or face to face sexual harassment situations. The study revealed that after reading a written description of a harassing interview situation, 62% of women said they would question or confront the man in the vignette who was depicted as being sexually harassing, while 28% of the women would leave or rudely confront him. In contrast, when the study was designed so that the female participants were interacting with a sexually harassing man in a face to face interview situation, 52% of the women ignored the sexist comments altogether, while 36% politely asked the man to clarify his sexually harassing questions. This study supports the idea that women do not confront because they fear costs, however this fear is not always apparent to women until they are in a harassing situation.

Women who are sexually harassed have to consider many factors when deciding how they should respond to the harassment. In these situations a woman has to consider how the perpetrator will react to the various responses she has available to her. The perpetrators' possible emotional, cognitive and behavioural reactions have to be assessed and most women recognize that these reactions have the potential to be negative. Thus, women are right to be concerned about men's reactions when they consider confronting.

#### Research on Men's Reactions to Confrontations of Bias

Research specifically examining men's reactions to confrontations of sexual harassment has yet to be conducted. However, a related study by Czopp and Monteith (2003) investigated reactions to confrontations after men and women read scenarios depicting confrontations of either racial or gender bias. The most interesting result as it pertains to the current study was that men who read scenarios in which a woman confronted gender bias did *not* support items assessing feelings of being irked and amused and experiences of discomfort and annoyance. Although this study suggests that reactions to confrontations of a similar issue may not be as negative as women anticipate, there is still much to be done to investigate men's reactions to confrontations of sexual harassment.

Research that has investigated reactions to confrontations of other forms of discrimination has also found evidence that supports confronting as a method for

responding to harassment. Hyers (2000) investigated men's reactions to face to face confrontations of heterosexism. Through the use of a complex laboratory study using male confederates she was able to induce biased remarks from participants which were then confronted. She found that the type of confrontation style and the level of prejudice confronted (overt versus subtle) influenced participant's reactions to confrontations. The level of prejudice confronted was found to have an effect on participant mood, where overt perpetrators of discrimination experienced more guilt than subtle perpetrators or men who made no prejudicial comments. Type of confrontation style was found to have an impact on perpetrator's opinions of the confronter as well. Confederates who confronted participants in a hostile way were rated as less flexible, less polite, more sensitive and more likely to say what was on their minds. Behaviourally, Hyers found that after being confronted perpetrators made fewer subsequent prejudicial comments, a finding that is very encouraging. Hyers also found that some participants engaged in the behavioural reaction of repair (trying to make up to the individual who confronted them) when they were confronted about heterosexism. These reactions were influenced by the type of confrontation style used. For instance, men in the non-hostile confrontation groups were less likely to repair in comparison to men in the hostile confrontation and control groups. While this finding on increased efforts to repair the relationships may seem to contradict the participants' more negative views of the men who confronted them in a hostile way, the conflict literature suggests that this type of compromise in conflict situations (which the hostile confrontation would have created) is not uncommon when peers of equal status are involved (Phillips and Cheston 1979). In addition, research by Tangney and colleagues has shown that threat to self (which would also be likely when hostility was present) is related to negative emotional reactions such as feelings of shame or guilt (Tangney 1991, 1992; Tangney et al. 1992). Guilt and shame have been shown to be two distinct but related constructs (Tangney 1991). Thus, both can be present in any given situation. Experiencing guilt in threatening situations is often associated with the realization that harm to others has occurred, and may trigger interpersonal repair attempts. Meanwhile, shame has been linked to anger, other-blame and hostile reactions (Tangney 1992; Tangney et al. 1992).

#### The Current Study

Our goal in this study was to investigate men's reactions to a hypothetical woman's confrontation of a man's sexual harassment. Detailed scenarios depicting a sexual harassment situation were used to provide the harassment context and male participants' reactions to confrontations were

assessed through the use of a questionnaire. The influence of two variables (type of harassment confronted and type of confrontation style) on men's reactions was investigated.

#### *Rationale for the Sexual Harassment Scenario Chosen*

Because sexual harassment affects a disproportionately large number of women in comparison to men, the influence of power and inequality on sexual harassment perpetration is hard to deny. Even theorists who do not overtly adopt a feminist perspective claim that a "desire to protect one's social status..." (Berdahl 2007, p. 641) is a primary motivation in sexual harassment. MacKinnon (1979) argues that social imbalances of power make sexual harassment of women by men a viable and often utilized option for men to maintain their power over women. Hotelling and Zuber (1997) describe it as "a manifestation of the cultural patterns of male-female interactions: an extension of 'normal' behaviour that is taught and expected from an early age" (p. 101).

Our primary scenario therefore presented a situation in which a woman is sexually harassed by a man (the male participant). Because men hold more social power than women in most western countries, sexual harassment does not just occur between supervisors and subordinates, but also happens between co-workers and peers (Hotelling and Zuber 1997). Thus, we determined that using a scenario depicting peer to peer sexual harassment would adequately depict a situation in which sexual harassment could occur without the additional power imbalance of different organizational power. We also used a university sample, and believed that the type of scenario used in this study (depicting an academic task) enabled participants to more adequately imagine themselves in the situation.

#### *Impact of Type of Sexual Harassment*

Our first research question was, does the type of sexual harassment confronted affect men's anticipated reactions? Two harassment levels, based upon Gelfand et al.'s (1995) tripartite definition of sexual harassment were used to test for possible differences in reactions to confrontations of more subtle or obvious harassment. Gender harassment (behaviour which is hostile and degrading to women) is a more subtle form of sexual harassment, while unwanted sexual attention (behaviour such as requests for dates, letters, phone calls, touching, sexual propositions, and even assault) is more overt. Men's reactions to the most obvious and recognizable form of sexual harassment, sexual coercion, were not assessed in this study. This decision was based on the fact that only a small portion of sexual harassment cases (5–10%) fit the definition of coercion (Gelfand et al. 1995). We thought it important to focus our

attention on gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention which occur over 50% and 20–25% (respectively) of the time.

Research shows us that men are more likely to think that more subtle sexually harassing behaviours (such as gender harassment and some forms of unwanted sexual attention) are not harassment (Baker et al. 1990; Jones and Remland 1992). This lack of recognition of subtle sexual harassment comes as no surprise to feminist theorists, as society has taught men that they have a right to unfettered visual and physical access to women, and that sexist jokes, images, and comments are normal and expected (particularly in male dominated workplaces). Because men do not identify all behaviours which are covered under harassment policies as actual sexual harassment, and instead classify them as normal behaviours (like telling jokes), we believed that men's reactions to a confrontation may well vary depending upon whether the behaviour confronted is more subtle or overt.

This idea is supported by research and theory by Tangney and others (Tangney 1991, 1992; Tangney et al. 1992). Their research suggests that specific feelings are associated with evaluations of wrong doing. Guilt arises when individuals perceive that they have done something wrong and harmful to another. In situations in which guilt is aroused the individual has evaluated their own actions as inappropriate. On the other hand, feelings of shame and anger arise when individuals perceive that they are being appraised by another (but not themselves) as engaging in immoral or incorrect behaviour. When shame is felt a person's focus is on the self and they do not perceive harm to others as strongly as they feel a threat to the self.

Tangney et al.'s theory, combined with predictions based on feminist theory, lead us to posit that when men are accused of gender harassment they are likely to experience shock and feelings of threat to self, and thus shame, anger and hostile feelings towards the individual who is accusing them of wrong doing. Conversely, in more obviously harassing situations, where men are more likely to perceive that they have transgressed, when men are confronted about sexual harassment they may be more likely to acknowledge their behaviour as inappropriate and to feel guilt instead of shame and anger. Thus, we expected that negative opinions of and negative behaviour toward the confronter would occur more often in the situation of more subtle (and thus more socially acceptable) sexual harassment than in the more obvious situation of sexual harassment. In contrast, the more obvious sexual harassment condition was expected to create more self-directed negative feelings for men.

#### *Impact of Style of Confrontation*

Our second research question asked whether the type of confrontation style used by a female confronter would



affect men's anticipated reactions. Four types of confrontation styles were assessed in this study against a no confrontation control group. The four confrontation styles were: hostile assertive, non-hostile assertive, humorous/sarcastic and exclamation. These choices were based on past research which has shown that these are the types of verbal responses that women report they would use if, or have used when, they were sexually harassed (e.g., Gruber and Bjorn 1982; Gutek and Koss 1993; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board 1995).

Feminist theory would predict that assertive or hostile confrontations would be particularly threatening to men because they question or challenge men's power over women more directly than non-assertive strategies, and because these would be non-stereotypical (non-feminine) ways for a woman to respond (MacKinnon 1979). Swim and Hyers (1999) discuss the possibility that women do not confront sexual harassment due to fears of being perceived as impolite or aggressive because of the inconsistency of confronting and the female gender role.

The idea that aggressive or hostile confrontations lead to more negative reactions is also supported by Kowalski's (1996) theoretical model of complaining. Kowalski maintains that "...to the extent that the affect and content of the complaint are derogatory and negative, the target of the complainant responds with hostility" (p. 190). Tangney's research and theory also supports the idea that aggressive confrontations may lead to more negative reactions. These types of confrontations could cause perpetrators to experience a threat to self and lead to negative feelings such as anger, in comparison to reactions that may arise when someone is confronted in a more diplomatic or indirect way. As reviewed previously, Hyers' (2000) research showed that hostile confrontations can lead to more repair attempts but also to more negative assessments of the confronter. Research by Czopp et al. (2006) also found that the type of confrontation style had an impact on reactions. Based on theory and past research results, we expected that the more hostile and assertive types of confrontations would lead to more negative opinions, feelings and behavioural reactions.

### *Types of Reactions*

Past research that used questionnaires to assess reactions to confrontations has not been theoretically driven. Rather, items were derived from research participants' self-reports of their own reactions to being confronted (e.g., Czopp and Monteith 2003) or from victim's reports of the perpetrator's reactions (e.g., Swim and Hyers 1999). In this study we attempted to make use of previous work, while at the same time using attitude theory to guide our creation of a measure to assess men's reactions to confrontations.

Much of the theory related to men's reactions to confrontations is related to the experience of certain feelings. For example, Burke (1991) and Tangney (1991, 1992) describe how identity threat leads to feelings of distress. We believed that being confronted about sexual harassment would be interpreted by men as a threat to self, and as such, men who imagine themselves being confronted would experience various negative emotions including anger, threat and guilt. The idea that negative emotions will arise after a confrontation is also found in theories of complaining by Kowalski (1996) that describe how confrontations that are deemed to be unsubstantiated or unverifiable can lead to more negative reactions than if the confrontation is deemed to be warranted. Previous research has also suggested that men act amused or entertained in response to some confrontations, a 'put-down' of the seriousness of female claims. This response is also predicted by feminist theory, particularly the idea that some types of confrontation by women could be perceived as ridiculous due to the confronters' "unfeminine" behaviour and its inability to impact him. Based on these theories, we decided to investigate men's emotional (feeling) reactions of threat, anger, shame, guilt and entertainment.

The link between attitudes (evaluations based on feelings and opinions toward someone or something) and behaviour has been well established when the attitudes are directly pertinent to the situation (Myers and Spencer 2001). Thus, we believed that men's opinions of the confronter and anticipated behaviours should also be assessed. Items to assess positive and negative opinions of the confronter were used (taken mainly from past research on harassment). It was anticipated that opinions would be related to the feelings elicited by the confrontations and would thus include opinions of the confronter as irrational, sensitive, or threatening (related to feelings of anger and threat), entertaining (related to feelings of entertainment), and correct in her beliefs (related to feelings of guilt).

Behaviours are associated with feelings and opinions, and it is often men's behaviours that women fear when they contemplate confrontations. Unfortunately, past research has been limited in the types of behaviours they have assessed. Thus, one of our particular aims was to investigate behavioural reactions to confrontations. The types of behaviours to be included were decided upon by an examination of the behavioural coping literature. For instance, Greve and Strobl (2004) described how individuals cope with threat, outlining the various social manifestations of this type of coping. These reactions are related to labelling, norm change, censorship, propaganda, erosion of tradition, and sticking/not sticking to patterns, etc. We decided to assess behavioural reaction in the broad categories of these types of behaviours: verbal behaviour, physical behaviour, and isolating behaviour.

### *Attitudes and Men's Reactions to Confrontation*

Although sexual harassers are similar to non-harassers in many ways, research has consistently found that harassers do hold attitudes towards power and sex and gender issues which differ in degree in comparison to men who do not harass women. For example, perpetrators have higher scores on dominance, anti-femininity, likelihood to rape and sexist attitude measures (e.g., Driscoll et al. 1998; Lee et al. 2003; Pryor et al. 1995; Pryor and Stoller 1994). Men who harass are also more likely to rate themselves as stereotypically male (or even hyper-masculine), to link sexuality with dominance, and to have a willingness to exploit others (e.g., Driscoll et al. 1998). The relationship between men's attitudes and their likelihood to sexually harass has also been well documented by these researchers.

Unfortunately, when women in real situations have to decide whether to confront a man who is harassing them, they may not know where the man stands on the continuum of sexist attitudes. Thus, we made the decision to assess and co-vary hostile attitudes toward women so that an understanding of men's reactions to the experimental manipulations could be achieved above and beyond the influence of these attitudes. Pryor (1987) developed a scale to assess men's likelihood to sexually harass. Men who score high on this scale endorse overt or quid-pro-quo (sexual coercion) forms of sexual harassment. Because we based the scenarios in this study on the more common forms of sexual harassment committed by a broader group of men, we co-varied men's likelihood to harass in order to detect effects above and beyond the more extreme attitudes held by this minority of men.

### Hypotheses

(See Methods for details on the creations of reaction scales.)

1. Type of sexual harassment and opinions: Men in the gender harassment condition will believe (a) that the confronter is more irritating (scores on the Opinion Irritated Scale), and (b) has less integrity (Opinion True to Self Scale) in comparison to the men in the unwanted sexual attention condition.
2. Type of sexual harassment and feelings: Men in the gender harassment condition will feel (a) less guilty (Feel Guilty Scale) and (b) less threatened (Feel Threatened Scale). They will also (c) feel more irritated by the confronter (Feel Irritated), and (d) will take her confrontation less seriously (Feel Entertained) in comparison to men in the unwanted sexual attention condition.
3. Type of sexual harassment and behaviours: Men in the gender harassment condition will report that they would

provide more (a) negative verbal responses (Negative Verbal Behaviour Scale) to the confronter, (b) would be more likely to retaliate in direct ways (Negative Action Scale), and that they (c) would be more likely to ignore or isolate her (Isolation Behaviour Scale) in comparison to men in the unwanted sexual attention condition.

4. Type of confrontation and opinions: Men in the hostile assertive and the non-hostile assertive conditions will (a) believe that the woman confronting them is more annoying (Opinion Irritating Scale), and (b) has less integrity (Opinion True to Self Scale) in comparison to men in the humour/sarcastic, exclamation, and control groups.
5. Type of confrontation and feelings: Men in the hostile assertive and the non-hostile assertive conditions will report experiencing (a) less guilt (Feel Guilty) and more (b) annoyance (Feel Irritated), (c) amusement (Feel Entertained), and (d) personal threat (Feel Threatened) in comparison to the other three confrontation conditions.
6. Type of confrontation and behaviours: Men in the hostile assertive and the non-hostile assertive conditions will report wanting to respond to the confrontation with more (a) negative speech (Negative Verbal Behaviour) and (b) physical retaliation (Negative Action), and (c) by withdrawing support and attention (Isolation Behaviour) in comparison to men in the other three confrontation conditions.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 250 undergraduate university men from a medium sized university located in Ontario, Canada. The majority of participants (96%) were recruited through the psychology participant pool. Because random sampling was not possible due to the small proportion of men in the participant pool (20%), a list of all men in need of bonus points was obtained and those who responded to phone or e-mail requests participated. Because participants were not informed about the true topic under investigation, selection bias based on the topic is unlikely. The remaining 4% of participants were recruited through classroom requests for participants or through face-to-face requests in the university student center. Sixty-eight percent of all participants identified as White, 10% as Black, 8% as Indian/South Asian, 5.6% as Middle Eastern, 4.8% as Chinese/East Asian, and 3.6% of participants reported that they were biracial, other, or did not indicate their ethnicity. A good mix of university faculties was represented. Participants recruited through the participant pool received a 1% bonus

for their psychology course while men recruited through other methods chose either a \$5 payment or a ballot for a \$100 lottery.

### Procedure

In order to ensure that participant responses would not be influenced by the topic of sexual harassment, participants were recruited for a study investigating men's reactions to situations involving interpersonal conflict. Men were tested in small groups (max. 12 participants) in classrooms on campus. Participants signed the consent form and then completed a questionnaire booklet which instructed them to complete the booklet from front to back without going back. Participants were individually thanked and debriefed by the female experimenter, specifically asking them not to divulge the true purpose of the study to other potential participants. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they had about the study and were provided with a pamphlet on sexual harassment and a resource contact sheet.

### Measure

#### *Distracter and Experimental Vignettes*

Each questionnaire booklet contained two vignettes. The first vignette was a distracter scenario used to foster the participants' belief that they were participating in a study investigating reactions to general interpersonal conflict. This vignette depicted a situation in which two male roommates experienced a conflict about their shared living conditions (having friends over, tidiness). Participant reactions to the distracter vignette were not analyzed.

The second vignette was the experimental scenario. It was adapted from a scenario used by Swim and Hyers (1999) and depicted a sexually harassing situation and confrontation involving peers who are engaged in a decision making activity. Participants were asked to try to imagine themselves as the male character in the scenario even if they thought they would never be involved in a situation like the one described. Participants were randomly assigned to receive one of ten versions of this scenario. The critical elements of the gender harassment scenario are presented here with square brackets denoting wording altered depending on the experimental condition:

Imagine that you are involved in a problem solving task for a university class. You are paired with another student ... (description of rules provided to them). You and your partner are asked to select twelve people from this list who would be most useful to the survival of a group stranded on a deserted island. You also have the option to select

people not on the list. The purpose of the task is to come to consensus as to what type of occupational skills would be most beneficial for the hypothetical group's survival, and to write a report explaining your decisions. Your partner is a woman named Jenn and she is concerned about the project because it is worth 40% of the final class grade. You are working on the project in a private area of the student center. You and Jenn have decided that each of you will make one selection at a time until all twelve occupations are selected. Jenn starts by picking a construction worker to help build shelters. You pick an athletic trainer to help keep everyone in shape, stating that "[they definitely need to keep the women in shape]." Jenn's next selection is an inventor, stating they can "aid in the technological advancement of the group". You then propose a chef, but change your mind stating, "[One of the women will be able to cook instead]." And you select the teacher instead of the chef. The task continues and Jenn picks a meteorologist to "help predict the weather". You pick the musician and as a reason you state "[We need more women on the island to keep the men satisfied]." Jenn turns to you and says ... (confrontation type inserted).

The experimental vignettes varied by the level of sexual harassment and type of confrontation style depicted. The level of sexual harassment described was either gender harassment (as shown above) or unwanted sexual attention (e.g., last comment "We need more women, maybe someone like you who can keep the men satisfied. Then you touch Jenn's thigh."). The types of confrontation styles used were non-hostile assertive (i.e., "Your behaviour is inappropriate. What you are doing is sexual harassment, so please don't act that way again."), hostile assertive (i.e., "Listen asshole, stop making all of those pathetic sexually harassing comments."), exclamation (i.e., "Oh my god! I can't believe you said that!"), and humorous/sarcastic (i.e., "Said in a laughing voice: Hey buddy, do these charming comments always impress the ladies, or am I the only one who doesn't like to be sexually harassed?"). These confrontation responses were presented at the end of each scenario. In addition, there was also a control version of the scenario in which no confrontation took place (after the male characters' last comment the ending "the activity continues" was used to conclude the scenario).

#### *Men's Reactions*

In order to address past limitations while at the same time making use of the prior work in this field, we created a

theoretically based questionnaire to assess men's reactions by adapting items used by other researchers (Czopp and Monteith 2003; Hyers 2000; Kaiser and Miller 2001; Kaiser and Miller 2004; Near and Jensen 1983; Shelton and Stewart 2004) with the addition of some new items, many of which addressed behaviours. These items were intended to measure men's emotional reactions (feeling angry, guilty, threatened, entertained), their opinions of the confronter (as sensitive, irrational, true to herself, and irritating) and anticipated behaviours (verbal, actions, and isolation).

After reading each scenario, participants were asked to complete this questionnaire. The measure began with an open ended question which asked men to "please list at least two reactions you would have toward Jenn (the female character in the vignette) during and after this interaction". The results of the open ended question are not reported here. The questionnaire continued with 65 closed-ended questions to assess men's feelings, opinions, and behavioural reactions. Participants were asked to respond to each item on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). We began with a large number of items in an effort to assess the full range of reactions predicted by theory and which research shows women fear if they were to confront a harasser. Twenty-three items assessed opinions of the confronter, 20 items assessed participants' feelings, and 22 items assessed behaviours.

In order to assess the degree to which the items used measured the constructs they were intended to measure, principal components analyses were conducted on the items from each category (feelings, opinions, and behaviours). Principal Components (PCA) with Direct Oblimin rotation was used as the extraction method for all of the analyses. Scree plots were used to determine the number of factors that would be examined. In addition, the items in each factor also had to conform to our theoretical expectations in order for the factor to be included as a scale in the analyses.

When the 20 items used to assess feelings were analysed, four factors emerged. The first factor, labelled Feel Guilty ( $\alpha=.94$ ,  $M=5.13$ ,  $SD=1.56$ , range=1–7), was comprised of nine items describing feelings of guilt and discomfort (worried, disappointed with myself, embarrassed, guilty, dissatisfied with myself, tense, uncomfortable, shameful, and self critical). The second factor that emerged, Feel Irritated ( $\alpha=.76$ ,  $M=3.39$ ,  $SD=1.58$ , range=1–7), was made up of three items (annoyed, irritated, angry). The factor Feel Entertained ( $\alpha=.80$ ,  $M=2.56$ ,  $SD=1.42$ , range=1–6.75) contained four items (excited, amused, proud, like laughing). And the fourth and final feeling factor, Feel Threatened ( $\alpha=.68$ ,  $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=1.40$ , range=1–6.75), was made up of four items (shocked, fearful, threatened and confused). Feeling guilty, irritated (angry)

and threatened are all supported by Tangney's (1991; Tangney et al. 1992) work on reactions to threat to self. Feeling entertained is supported by previous research and our reasoning using feminist theory. Thus, these four factors were retained and used as scales in this research.

When the PCA was conducted on the 23 items used to assess opinions three factors were found. Fourteen items loaded on the first factor, labelled Opinion Irritating ( $\alpha=.89$ ,  $M=3.44$ ,  $SD=1.1$ , range=1.29–7). These items rated how much the confronter was considered: unreasonable, argumentative, a troublemaker, a complainer, to be making excuses for their shortcomings, not flexible, and irritating, *and not* respectable, warm, considerate, polite, likeable, easy to get along with, or someone who makes a good impression. The second factor that emerged, Opinion True to Self ( $\alpha=.83$ ,  $M=5.48$ ,  $SD=1.11$ , range=1.33–7), can be described as measuring opinions of the confronter as someone who is true to themselves, honest and intelligent and was comprised of six items (honest, intelligent, independent, responsible, true to herself, speaks her mind). The third factor, named Opinion Sensitive ( $\alpha=.49$ ), was made up of three items assessing opinions of the confronter as sensitive and emotional. Unfortunately, due to the low internal consistency of the Opinion Sensitive scale we were unable to use this scale in the analyses.

Because Kowalski (1996) discusses how the interpretation of a confrontation (as being warranted or not) influences reactions, the idea of evaluating a confronter as True to Themselves (for engaging in the confrontation) makes theoretical sense. In addition, past research in the area of discrimination complaints has found that this construct is significantly related to perceptions of a complainer (Kaiser and Miller 2001). Thus, this factor was accepted as a scale in our analyses. In addition, because ratings of irritation are likely related to opinions of the person as 'being' irritating and feelings of anger, we also included the Opinion Irritating scale. Table 1 presents scale inter-correlations.

The analysis of the 22 items intended to assess behavioural reactions yielded four factors. The first factor that emerged measured men's negative verbal reactions. Items from this scale, Negative Verbal Behaviour ( $\alpha=.88$ ,  $M=2.63$ ,  $SD=1.27$ , range=1–7), described the following nine behaviours: telling others about what happened, apologizing but not meaning it, telling the confronter that sometimes things like this just happen, being critical of the confronter's work, telling them to lighten up, telling them that your position is right, *and not* apologizing and avoiding this type of behaviour in the future, talking the situation over with the confronter and working it out, or giving the confronter a positive evaluation. The second factor, named Isolation Behaviour ( $\alpha=.92$ ,  $M=2.47$ ,  $SD=1.40$ , range=1–7), contained seven items describing these



**Table 1** Correlations between scales.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Hostile sexism											
2 LSH	.32**										
3 True to self	-.08	-.08									
4 Irritating	.35**	.26**	-.32**								
5 Guilty	-.18**	-.14*	.31**	-.33**							
6 Irritated	.24**	.13*	-.05	.51**	.01						
7 Entertained	.31**	.23**	-.26**	.40**	-.59**	.31**					
8 Threatened	.14*	.03	.10	.09	.46**	.35**	-.06				
9 Neg. verbal	.36**	.36**	-.24**	.61**	-.62**	.43**	.69**	-.09			
10 Isolation	.24**	.27**	-.12	.46**	-.09	.49**	.30**	.24**	.59**		
11 Neg. action	.23**	.28**	-.11	.39**	-.27**	.37**	.44**	.04	.62**	.54**	

Shaded area indicates inter-correlations between the reaction scales

LSH – Likelihood to sexually harass

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

reactions: not working/socializing with this person again, excluding this person from future meetings/social activities, ignoring them, warning other people to stay away from them, avoiding others who want to work or socialize with this person, telling others that they should not work or socialize with this person, and excluding this person from meetings/social activities that they have previously attended. An eighth item (giving the woman less desirable tasks to do), which did not relate to the other items in this factor and which had the lowest factor loading, was discarded. The third behavioural factor that emerged, named Negative Action Behaviour ( $\alpha = .71$ ,  $M = 1.49$ ,  $SD = .86$ , range = 1–7), was made up of three items that described punitive actions such as making prank phone calls or other annoying activities, physically aggressing against the woman, and taking away perks she enjoyed. As theory predicted, these first three factors corresponded to the types of behaviours believed to be associated with coping with threat, and thus the scales were retained for analysis. The fourth factor that emerged contained two items, both of which had low factor loadings, thus this factor and its corresponding items were not used in the analyses.

While a rotation method that allows for correlations between factors was used, once the PCAs were complete

scale correlations were conducted to examine the relationship that the scales had with each other. Although the majority of the created scales were significantly correlated, the correlations were not high. An exception to this is the moderate to high correlation between Negative Verbal Behaviour and Feel Entertained. However, due to the exploratory nature of this study the decision was made to include both of these as separate scales, as the items belonging to each appear to measure unique, although related, types of reactions. Thus, after the PCAs were complete, nine reaction scales were used to assess men's reactions to hypothetical confrontations of sexual harassment in this study. Scores for each scale were computed by calculating the average score across the scale items, thus scale scores ranged from 1 to 7 with higher scores indicating more agreement. The scale inter-correlations are presented in Table 1.

#### Attitude Measures

The Hostile Subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick and Fiske 1996) and the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale (LSH; Pryor 1987) were used to assess participants' hostile attitudes toward women and propensity to engage in sexual harassment. The score on the LSH is

computed by summing participant responses to each of ten scenarios, while Hostile Subscale scores are derived by computing the average score of a list of items. Cronbach's alpha for the LSH scale was .92 and for the Hostile Subscale of the ASI it was .89.

### Realism Check

In order to assess whether participants thought that the sexual harassment scenario was believable they were asked to rate how realistic it was on a seven point scale ranging from 1 (completely unrealistic) to 7 (completely realistic).

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

Scale descriptives and reliabilities were calculated. Reaction scale ranges, means and standard deviations are reported above in "Method". Means and standard deviations for the dependent variables in each of the conditions are presented in Table 2. Collapsing across the various conditions, men responded to the vignette describing their hypothetical sexual harassment of a female peer by feeling guilty but not irritated, threatened or entertained. They saw the woman who they harassed as true to herself and not irritating and they denied that they would engage in any negative behaviors. Correlations between the reaction scales are presented in Table 1.

### Realism Check

The average response to the validity check question was 5.15 ( $SD=1.48$ ) on a seven point scale where 7 was

'completely realistic'. No significant differences in ratings, based on level of harassment or type of confrontation style depicted, were found. This indicates that participants found the sexual harassment scenarios to be realistic.

### Covariates

In order to assess the relationship between the potential covariates (the Hostile Subscale of the ASI and the LSH) and the dependent variables, correlations between these variables were computed. Scores on the LSH Scale ( $M=16.88$ ,  $SD=8.46$ ) were found to relate to most of the dependent variables. The Hostile Subscale of the ASI ( $M=2.51$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) was also related to the majority of the dependent variables. The two measures were not correlated highly with each other. Thus, both scales were included as covariates in the subsequent analyses.

### Main Analyses

In order to test the hypotheses, three MANCOVAs assessing the effects of level of sexual harassment and type of confrontation on the dependent variables assessing men's opinion, feeling and behavioural reactions to the hypothetical sexual harassment confrontations were conducted. See MANCOVA Tables 3, 4 and 5 for details. Level of sexual harassment and type of confrontation were included in the same analyses so that, while not expected, interactions between them were also considered. To simplify the presentations of the findings however, type of harassment and style of confrontation are discussed separately below in line with the hypotheses. ANCOVAs were used to interpret significant MANCOVAs and Bonferoni corrections were used to control for Type 1 error at the multivariate and

**Table 2** Means and SDs for the dependent variables by harassment and confrontation conditions.

	Gender harassment Mean (SD)	Unwanted sexual attention Mean (SD)	Non-hostile assertive Mean (SD)	Humour/Sarcastic Mean (SD)	Exclamation Mean (SD)	Hostile assertive Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)
Opinion irritating	3.68 (1.12)**	3.19 (1.06)	3.29 (1.24) <sub>b</sub>	3.57 (1.02) <sub>ab</sub>	3.24 (1.01) <sub>b</sub>	3.92 (1.04) <sub>a</sub>	3.16 (1.11) <sub>b</sub>
Opinion true to self	5.32 (1.12)*	5.64 (1.09)	5.89 (.88) <sub>b</sub>	5.65 (1.00) <sub>b</sub>	5.61 (.83) <sub>b</sub>	5.55 (1.12) <sub>b</sub>	4.70 (1.31) <sub>a</sub>
Feel guilty	4.59 (1.63)**	5.67 (1.27)	5.34 (1.69) <sub>a</sub>	5.03 (1.46) <sub>a</sub>	4.79 (1.69) <sub>a</sub>	5.42 (1.40) <sub>a</sub>	5.01 (1.49) <sub>a</sub>
Feel irritated	3.33 (1.65)	3.44 (1.51)	3.35 (1.72) <sub>a</sub>	3.49 (1.54) <sub>a</sub>	3.04 (1.64) <sub>a</sub>	3.69 (1.52) <sub>a</sub>	3.35 (1.46) <sub>a</sub>
Feel entertained	2.76 (1.45)*	2.36 (1.37)	1.94 (1.12) <sub>a</sub>	2.88 (1.32) <sub>b</sub>	3.01 (1.50) <sub>b</sub>	2.40 (1.45) <sub>ab</sub>	2.58 (1.48) <sub>ab</sub>
Feel threatened	2.92 (1.29)**	3.83 (1.37)	3.17 (1.50) <sub>a</sub>	3.80 (1.30) <sub>a</sub>	3.23 (1.47) <sub>a</sub>	3.45 (1.31) <sub>a</sub>	3.24 (1.39) <sub>a</sub>
Negative verbal behaviour	2.87 (1.33)**	2.39 (1.17)	2.44 (1.42) <sub>a</sub>	2.80 (1.04) <sub>a</sub>	2.61 (1.35) <sub>a</sub>	2.74 (1.51) <sub>a</sub>	2.57 (.99) <sub>a</sub>
Negative actions	1.43 (.77)	1.54 (.86)	1.40 (.68) <sub>a</sub>	1.58 (.94) <sub>a</sub>	1.57 (1.09) <sub>a</sub>	1.53 (.89) <sub>a</sub>	1.36 (.62) <sub>a</sub>
Isolation behaviour	2.27 (1.34)	2.67 (1.43)	2.79 (1.64) <sub>ab</sub>	2.43 (1.17) <sub>ab</sub>	2.20 (1.39) <sub>ab</sub>	2.85 (1.55) <sub>a</sub>	2.08 (1.05) <sub>b</sub>

Means with differing subscripts within a confrontation style row are significantly different from each other at  $p<.001$

\* Indicates means within harassment type row are significantly different at  $p\leq.01$

\*\* Indicates means within harassment type row are significantly different at  $p<.001$

**Table 3** Multivariate analysis of covariance for the opinion scales.

Variable	df (error df)	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	Observed power
MANCOVA				
Type of harassment (H)	2 (237)	11.15**	.09	.99
Type of confrontation (C)	8 (476)	8.58**	.13	1.00
H × C	8 (474)	.90	.02	.42
Hostile subscale	2 (237)	15.01**	.11	1.00
LSH	2 (237)	3.83*	.03	.69
ANCOVA				
Type of harassment				
Opinion true to self	1 (238)	6.78*	.03	.74
Opinion irritating	1 (238)	21.30**	.08	1.00
Type of confrontation				
Opinion true to self	4 (238)	9.47**	.14	1.00
Opinion irritating	4 (238)	4.30*	.07	.93

Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Wilks Lambda

*LSH* Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale

\* $p < .025$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

univariate level and in Tukey's HSD tests of differences between means. As a reminder, all dependent variable scale scores ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating more support for the construct named in the scale.

#### Effect of Type of Sexual Harassment Confronted

##### *Hypothesis 1*

We predicted that men in the gender harassment condition would believe the confronter was (a) more irritating (have higher scores on the Opinion Irritating Scale) and (b) had less integrity (lower scores on the Opinion True to Self

Scale) than men in the unwanted sexual attention condition. A MANCOVA with the Opinion scales of True to Self and Irritating as dependent variables was conducted. See Table 3 for full detail.

A main effect for type of harassment was found ( $p < .001$ ) and hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. Although both groups slightly disagreed with statements from the Opinion Irritating scale, men in the gender harassment condition were more likely to endorse these statements ( $p < .001$ ). When the significant group difference on the scale assessing whether participants thought that the confronter was true to herself was assessed it was revealed that men in both the gender harassment and the unwanted sexual attention groups on average slightly agreed that the

**Table 4** Multivariate analysis of covariance for the feeling scales.

Variable	df (error df)	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	Observed power
MANCOVA				
Type of harassment (H)	4 (235)	12.44**	.18	1.00
Type of confrontation (C)	16 (719)	2.79**	.05	.98
H × C	16 (719)	.61	.01	.32
Hostile subscale	4 (235)	7.73**	.12	1.00
LSH	4 (235)	2.53**	.04	.71
ANCOVA				
Type of harassment				
Feel guilty	1 (238)	41.23**	.15	1.00
Feel irritated	1 (238)	.09	.00	.06
Feel entertained	1 (238)	9.71*	.04	.87
Feel threatened	1 (238)	29.07**	.11	1.00
Type of confrontation				
Feel guilty	4 (238)	2.01	.03	.59
Feel irritated	4 (238)	1.03	.02	.32
Feel entertained	4 (238)	6.03**	.09	.98
Feel threatened	4 (238)	2.09	.03	.61

Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Wilks Lambda

*LSH* Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale

\* $p < .013$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

**Table 5** Multivariate analysis of covariance for the behaviour scales.

Variable	df (error df)	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	Observed power
MANCOVA				
Type of harassment (H)	3 (236)	18.60**	.19	1.00
Type of confrontation (C)	12 (625)	2.52*	.04	.95
H × C	12 (625)	1.87	.03	.85
Hostile subscale	3 (236)	7.78**	.09	.99
LSH	3 (236)	9.06**	.10	1.00
ANCOVA				
Type of harassment				
Neg. verb. behav.	1 (238)	18.13**	.07	.99
Isolation behav.	1 (238)	3.70	.02	.48
Neg. action behav.	1 (238)	.19	.00	.07
Type of confrontation				
Neg. verb. behav.	4 (238)	.64	.01	.21
Isolation behav.	4 (238)	3.29*	.05	.83
Neg. action behav.	4 (238)	.99	.02	.31

Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Wilks Lambda

*Neg* negative, *Verb* verbal, *Behav.* behaviour, *LSH* Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale

\* $p < .017$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

confronter was true to herself, however, men in the gender harassment group were somewhat less likely to think this than men in the unwanted sexual attention group ( $p = .01$ ).

### Hypothesis 2

We hypothesized that men in the gender harassment condition would report feeling (a) less guilty and (b) less threatened (have lower scores on the Feel Guilty and Feel Threatened Scales) and (c) more irritated and (d) less likely to take the confronter seriously (higher scores on the Feel Irritated and Feel Entertained Scales). A main effect for type of harassment was found ( $p < .001$ ) and hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2d were supported. When univariate effects were examined significant group differences were found in scores for the scales assessing feelings of threat, entertainment, and guilt. No group differences were found in scores on the Feel Irritated scale (hypothesis 2c). When the significant group difference between scores of men's feelings of guilt were assessed, men in the unwanted sexual attention condition reported more guilt (they would feel slightly guilty) if they were confronted about sexual harassment in comparison to men in the gender harassment condition who would neither agree nor disagree with items describing feelings of guilt ( $p < .001$ ). The scores on the Feel Threatened scale revealed that men in the gender harassment condition would feel less threatened if they were confronted about sexual harassment in comparison to men in the unwanted sexual attention group ( $p < .001$ ). When mean scores on the Feel Entertained scale were examined, men in the gender harassment condition were more likely to feel entertained by a confrontation than men in the unwanted sexual attention condition ( $p = .002$ ). Although a significant difference was found, men in both

conditions moderately disagreed with statements that suggested that they found the confrontation entertaining.

### Hypothesis 3

It was anticipated that men in the gender harassment condition would be more likely to endorse negative behaviours against the female confronter than men in the other condition. Specifically, men who read scenarios depicting gender harassment would have higher scores on the scales assessing (a) negative verbal behaviour, (b) negative actions, and (c) isolation behaviours in comparison to men in the unwanted sexual attention group. The MANCOVA with the behaviour scales of Negative Verbal Behaviour, Negative Actions, and Isolation Behaviour as dependent variables (see Table 5 for full details) revealed a main effect for type of harassment ( $p < .01$ ), however only hypothesis 3a was supported.

Univariate effects revealed that level of sexual harassment only influenced men's reactions to items describing negative verbal behaviours. Although men from both conditions moderately disagreed that they would respond with negative verbal reactions, men in the more subtle gender harassment condition were more likely to have these negative reactions in comparison to men who were in the unwanted sexual attention group ( $p < .001$ ).

### Effect of Style of Confrontation

### Hypothesis 4

We predicted that men who read scenarios depicting hostile assertive or non-hostile assertive confrontation styles would rate the confronter more negatively. They would believe that



she is (a) more annoying (and would thus have higher scores on the Opinion Irritating Scale), and (b) that she has less integrity (lower scores on the Opinion True to Self Scale) than men reading about the three non-assertive confrontation styles. See Table 3 for full details. A main effect for type of confrontation was found ( $p < .001$ ) although both hypotheses were only minimally supported.

When univariate effects were examined there were few differences between groups. The Opinion True to Self scale scores revealed that men who had read scenarios in which no confrontation took place (the control group) did not think that the confronter had as much integrity (was as true to herself) as the men in all of the other confrontation groups ( $p < .001$ ). When the Opinion Irritating scale scores were examined, men who read scenarios depicting hostile assertive confrontations rated the confronter as more irritating than men in the control, non-hostile assertive, and exclamation groups ( $p = .002$ ). Although men do have relatively positive opinions of the female confronter, they are more likely to think a woman is irritating if she confronted in a hostile way. However, it is important to note that on average participants reported that they would slightly disagree with items describing the confronter as irritating; with men in the hostile assertive group simply being more likely to say that they don't disagree that she is irritating (their means approached a neutral perspective of neither agreeing nor disagreeing with statements describing the woman as irritating).

#### *Hypothesis 5*

It was hypothesized that men in the hostile and non-hostile assertive groups would report (a) less guilt (have lower scores on the Feel Guilty Scale) and more (b) annoyance, (c) amusement, and (d) personal threat (and thus have higher scores on the Feel Irritated, Feel Entertained and Feel Threatened Scales) in comparison to men in the other confrontation groups. A main effect was found ( $p < .001$ , see Table 4), although the hypotheses was not generally supported.

Surprisingly, the only emotion affected by type of confrontation was feelings of amusement/entertainment (hypothesis 5c),  $p < .001$ . Men in the non-hostile assertive group had the lowest scores on the Feel Entertained scale, indicating that they strongly disagreed that they would feel this way if confronted. These scores differed significantly from the scores of men in the humorous/sarcastic and exclamation groups who moderately and slightly disagreed, respectively, that they would feel entertained.

#### *Hypothesis 6*

We anticipated that men in the hostile and non-hostile assertive groups would respond to the confrontation

scenarios by reporting they would engage in more negative behaviours (have higher scores on the Negative Verbal, Negative Action, and Isolation Behaviour scales) than would men in other conditions. See Table 5 for full details. A main effect for type of confrontation was found ( $p = .003$ ), however only hypothesis 6c received support.

Style of confrontation had an impact on differences in men's reports of anticipated isolating behaviours,  $p = .012$ . Men who were in the control group were less likely to report that they would engage in isolating behaviours than men who were in the condition where the woman confronted them in a hostile assertive way. There were no other significant group differences. It is important to note that all groups had means that indicated that they moderately disagreed with items describing isolating behavioural reactions.

#### Interaction Between Type of Sexual Harassment and Style of Confrontation

No hypotheses were made regarding the possible interactions between type of sexual harassment and the style of confrontation, however interactions were assessed in the above analyses. No interactions between type of sexual harassment confronted and style of confrontation were found for any of the analyses (all  $ps = ns$ , see Tables 3, 4 and 5 for detail).

#### Effect of Attitudes on Reactions to Confrontations

The effect of the covariates was assessed in the above analyses and they did predict all categories of reactions as expected (see Tables 3, 4 and 5 for MANCOVA details). When the covariates were examined in the follow-up ANCOVA analyses it was found that both the Hostile Subscale of the ASI ( $p < .001$ ) and the LSH ( $p = .006$ ) were significantly related to the opinion of women as irritating. The Hostile Subscale was also significantly related to the Feel Irritated scale ( $p = .001$ ) and the Feel Entertained scale,  $p < .001$ . The LSH predicted variance in the Feel Guilty scale, and the Feel Entertained scale,  $p = .003$ . The Hostile Subscale was significantly related to Isolation Behaviour ( $p = .012$ ) and Negative Verbal Behaviour scores,  $p < .001$ . Meanwhile, the LSH scores were related to all of the behaviour scales: Isolation Behaviour,  $p < .001$ , Negative Verbal Behaviour,  $p < .001$ , and Negative Action Behaviour,  $p < .001$ . All significant relationships between the covariates and these scales were positive, with higher scores on the covariates associated with higher scores on the behaviour scales.

## Discussion

This study was conducted to examine how men would react after reading about confrontations of their own imagined

sexual harassment behaviour. We had proposed that the type of sexual harassment confronted and the style of confrontation used by the female character in the hypothetical scenario would influence men's reactions. Our results revealed that, on average, men do not react negatively when they imagine being confronted about sexual harassment. The average university man does not agree with items describing negative reactions (e.g., feeling entertained or threatened, thinking the confronter is irritating, or wanting to respond in a negative verbal way). Men's responses to items assessing women-positive reactions, such as feeling guilty and thinking the woman is true to herself, are encouraging. The average undergraduate man either agreed with, or at the very least did not disagree with (was neutral about), items describing these reactions.

Although men's average reactions to these hypothetical confrontations are positive, an understanding of the effects on men's reactions of the type of harassment confronted and type of confrontation style used is necessary so that women can assess harassment situations and make informed decisions about how to react. Knowing that the majority of men react well is the first step is assessing whether a woman should confront, but also knowing how other factors increase or decrease the risk of a potentially negative reaction can guide women to making more self-protective decisions.

#### The Type of Harassment Confronted and Men's Reactions

The type of sexual harassment that is confronted (gender harassment or unwanted sexual attention) does influence a range of possible reactions to confrontations. As predicted by theory, when men in this study were confronted about subtle harassment (gender harassment) they had more negative reactions than men who read confrontations of more obvious harassment (unwanted sexual attention). Men who were asked to envision themselves in the subtle sexual harassment scenario were more likely to think that the female confronter was irritating and unlikeable. Not surprisingly then, these men were more likely to support negative verbal reactions toward the woman confronter than were men who read about more overt instances of harassment. Negative verbal reactions included behaviours such as telling women who confront them that they did nothing wrong and refusing to apologize. Men in the gender harassment condition were also more likely to report that they would find a confrontation amusing and laughable. Men's opinions of the confronter as irritating can be linked to these feelings of amusement. The men may be so surprised at what they deem to be the woman's uncalled for reaction (her "over-reaction") and her "unfeminine" (non-traditional) confronting behavior, that they think they would cope with the situation by

laughing or experiencing other forms of amusement (Czopp and Monteith in 2003, also attributed their participants' reports of amusement as arising from feelings of condescension and not merriment).

In contrast, the men who were asked to imagine themselves in the more obviously harassing scenario (depicting unwanted sexual attention) were more likely to have positive reactions to the woman. For example, these men were more likely to think that the confronter had valuable characteristics such as being true to herself (likely because she stood up for herself), and to experience guilt and embarrassment.

Why is there a difference in men's reactions to confrontations of different forms of sexual harassment? It is well documented in the sexual harassment literature (Baker et al. 1990; Jones and Remland 1992), and predicted by feminist theory, that more subtle forms of sexual harassment are less frequently recognized as acts of discrimination, particularly by men. Thus, it seems likely that men's perception of whether sexual harassment has occurred influences their reactions to confrontations. Negative reactions based on perceptions of wrong doing, or in situations where people believe complaints are not warranted, are also predicted by theory on threat to self, recognition of wrong-doing and resulting feelings of guilt (Tangney 1991; Tangney et al. 1992), as well as theory on reactions to complaints (Kowalski 1996).

In our study, men in the unwanted sexual attention group reported feeling more threatened and fearful, which can also be explained by their interpretation of the sexual harassment vignette. Specifically, they are more likely than men in the gender harassment group to have identified the behaviour they read as harassment and thus, they experienced more guilt and threat that there may be consequences for their behaviour. Conversely, men in the gender harassment conditions may be less likely to view the behaviour that they read as sexual harassment and thus they do not experience threat and may believe that the confronter is acting inappropriately (e.g., she is emotional, crazy, overreacting). In response, these men are then more likely to think that the woman is irritating, to feel entertained by the situation but not guilty or threatened, and to be more likely to respond in negative verbal ways. Another possibility is that men in the gender harassment conditions *do* recognize the behaviour as sexual harassment, but they assess the behaviour as so mild that it should be ignored or tolerated by others. Tolerating sexual harassment, especially instances of gender harassment, is common in our society, where our social and conversational scripts often influence us to smile, laugh or participate in gender biased or harassing conversations or interactions. Thus, in this study, men reading about Jenn's violation of these norms would have likely had more negative reactions (in comparison to men from the unwanted sexual attention group).

If our findings are replicated in face-to-face confrontations, the implications for women who want to confront sexual harassment would be clear. Men will react more negatively if they are confronted about more subtle harassment behaviours than if they are confronted about more obvious ones. This finding has important implications for sexual harassment education programs. Education programs teaching men about sexual harassment could increase understanding of these behaviours. Then, if sexual harassment was confronted, men who recognize that harassment has indeed happened may react better.

### Confrontation Style and Men's Reactions

We had also hypothesized that the type of confrontation style depicted in the scenarios would have an impact on men's reactions, with more assertive confrontation styles being related to more negative reactions (as discussed by Kowalski 1996). Although type of confrontation style did have an impact on some of the participant's responses, in general we did not find that more assertive styles led to more negative reactions. Some minimal support for our hypotheses was found however and should be noted. For instance, men who read scenarios in which a hostile confrontation took place were more likely to rate the confronter as irritating, argumentative, and unlikeable in comparison to the other confrontation groups (except for the humorous/sarcastic group which may also be interpreted as slightly hostile due to the sarcastic nature of the comment). Thus, hostile (and perhaps even sarcastic) confrontations may be unwise for women to utilize if they are concerned about what the harasser will think of them.

In terms of the participants' personal reaction to the confrontations, the only group difference found was for feelings of being entertained or amused. Men who read humorous/sarcastic and exclamation scenarios were more likely to report that they would feel entertained by the confrontation, indicating that more assertive confrontation styles may be taken more seriously. Finally, the only other group difference in responses was for reports of support for behaviour ignoring and excluding her. Differences between the control/no confrontation group and the hostile assertive group were found. Although the hostile assertive group did not differ significantly from the other confrontation groups, men in this group did provide the highest support for isolating behaviours, and the fact that differences exist between it and the control group may mean that hostile assertive confrontations are more likely to lead to the confronter being isolated by the perpetrator. On the other hand, since the control group had the lowest support for this construct, this finding may also indicate that *any* confrontation may begin to support isolating behaviours.

Although the results of this study suggested only partial and quite limited support for the hypotheses that type of

confrontation style has effects on men's responses, other researchers have found support for a relationship between confrontation/resistance styles and perpetrator reactions (Czopp et al. 2006; Hyers 2000). Hyers (2000) found that in situations of heterosexism, confronters who used a non-hostile confrontation style received more positive ratings from the perpetrator than hostile confronters. On the other hand, when non-hostile confrontations were used, male perpetrators were less likely to try and repair their relationship with a male confronter. In conjunction with these findings, we suggest tentatively that hostile assertive confrontations may be taken more seriously and may lead to some more negative reactions in comparison to other styles. We believe that this issue will be important to explore in future research.

### Limitations and Future Research

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, men's reactions to hypothetical confrontations of sexual harassment were assessed through the use of a vignette and questionnaires. Although previous researchers have proven the usefulness of vignettes for gathering information (Stolte 1994) we acknowledge that a full understanding of men's reactions in a hypothetical situation is limited. Due to the inability to recreate situations exactly as they would occur in real life, participants in our study may not be able to fully assess how they would actually react in a real face-to-face confrontation situation. This could mean that the relatively non-harmful reactions reported here may be a result of an under-reporting of negative reactions. The deviant nature of sexual harassment can also have implications for participants' ability or willingness to envision themselves in this type of situation, or to feel safe in reporting the full extent of their reactions (if negative towards the confronter). Thus, while we based our vignette on one already established by other sexual harassment researchers, it would have been preferable to pilot test the validity of our manipulations of the key variables. Even with these limitations however, we believe that the results of this study are a good starting point for coming to understand how men react when confronted about sexual harassment. It will be important to extend our work and replicate our findings by using different vignettes with other situations represented.

The results of this study can only reasonably be thought to apply to real world situations which have characteristics that are similar to the situations used in this research, such as situations in which men and women have relatively equal organizational/structural power. The sexual harassment situation used in this study was a scenario depicting peer sexual harassment in an academic setting. It is important to keep in mind that men's reactions in situations in which there is a greater discrepancy in social power (e.g., a supervisor and a subordinate worker, or a professor and student) may be different from those reactions of men in peer confrontations.

Factors such as race, age, economic and class differences, and even cultural differences based on country of origin, could also influence how men react to confrontations of sexual harassment, as could dispositional characteristics such as attitudes other than the ones studied here. Future studies should examine the reactions of diverse samples of men.

Another limitation of this research is the use of a non-standardized questionnaire to assess men's reactions. This questionnaire was a compilation of items used in past research with the addition of some new items. In addition, due to the use of this previously untested questionnaire, Cronbach's alphas for two reaction scales were lower than optimal (one too low to use (Sensitive), the other marginal (Feel Threatened)). The marginal internal consistency for the Feel Threatened subscale may have affected our ability to detect effects. Further development and validation of the scales we used to assess men's reactions or other outcome measures to assess men's reactions, may lead to improved understanding of men's reactions.

## Conclusions

Our study has shown that the fear of costs that stop women from confronting sexual harassment is, on average, not warranted, at least in situations similar to the one described in this study. Men, on average, do not react negatively when they imagine being confronted about sexual harassment, and some positive reactions to confrontations were also found. In fact, the men who read about a woman who did not confront them about sexual harassment of any type, saw her as being less honest, intelligent, and true to herself than did men who were confronted in some way. With these results in mind, we believe it is also important for women to understand how factors such as the type of sexual harassment confronted and the type of confrontation style used, can increase or decrease women's risk for experiencing a negative reaction to a confrontation. We found that men are more likely to react negatively when more subtle forms of sexual harassment are confronted, and they may be more likely to take assertive confrontations more seriously and to respond negatively when hostile-assertive confrontations are used. We also found that attitudes influenced men's reactions. Not surprisingly, men are more likely to react negatively to a confrontation if they have more extreme sexist attitudes particularly ones involving hostility and supporting sexual harassment. However, the results of this study are generally positive for women. They indicate that women may have a feasible alternative for dealing with sexual harassment, while also helping women to understand what factors can lead to more positive or negative outcomes if they do confront a man who is harassing them.

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