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The Influence of Peer Interactions on Sexually Oriented Joke Telling

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Although the negative consequences and prevalence rates of sexual imposition are widely known through self-report surveys, currently there are few laboratory paradigms to examine the determinants of this type of behavior, especially peer sexual harassment. The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of two types of peer interactions on peer sexual harassment among college students using a laboratory paradigm of sexually oriented joke telling as an analogue of sexual harassment. Results from two different experiments revealed an effect of type of peer interaction on sexually oriented joke telling. In Experiment 1, male college students, who were exposed to a male peer who modeled sexually harassing behavior, subsequently told significantly more sexually oriented jokes to an unknown female peer than did male students exposed to a male peer who modeled nonsexually harassing behavior. In Experiment 2, male college students, who were exposed to a male peer who was seemingly sexist in his interaction with them, subsequently told significantly more sexually oriented jokes to an unknown female peer than did male students exposed to a male peer who was seemingly nonsexist in his interactions with them. These results suggest that peer interactions may serve as a disinhibiting situational factor of sexually harassing behaviors perpetrated by male college students on female peers. The results also provide further validity for the use of a laboratory paradigm for the study of peer sexual harassment.

KEY WORDS: sexual harassment; joke telling; analogue.

Peer Sexual Harassment: Definitions, Incidence, and Consequences

Sexual harassment, particularly sexual harassment among peers, is pervasive in academic environments (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Denmark, Rabinowitz, & Sechzer, 2000; Fineran & Bennett, 1999; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Frazier, Cochran, & Olson, 1995; Gutek, 1985; Hughes & Sandler, 1988; Keyton, 1996; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981). Peer sexual harassment typically occurs between a male perpetrator and a female victim of equal status, who do not have overt power relationships (e.g., classmates and social acquaintances) (Ivy & Hamlet, 1996), and it includes behaviors such as sexual joke telling, sexually offensive comments, teasing, sexual looks, sexual innuendoes, obscenities, and unwanted touching or kissing (Hughes & Sandler, 1988; Mazer & Percival, 1989; Sandler, 1997).

The most well known guidelines for defining sexual harassment were developed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980) and have been endorsed by the American Association of University Professors. Administrative policies regarding sexual harassment at numerous universities have typically incorporated the EEOC guidelines and have defined sexual harassment in specific behavioral terms. For example, the university where the current research was conducted

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specifically defines sexual harassment as including physical behaviors such as obscene gestures, embracing, and inappropriate touching. The policy also defines sexual harassment as including verbal behaviors such as sexually oriented jokes, insults, and taunts, as well as pictorial communications such as pin-ups, posters, and cartoons.

The majority of survey research on peer sexual harassment has focused on university students and faculty. However, there are few studies with these populations in which variables are controlled in an experimental context. In terms of the survey studies, it was found that college students are in the same age range as the bulk of victims and perpetrators of sexual victimization acts (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987), and college women may be three times more likely to be sexually victimized than their same age cohorts (Corbin, Bernat, Calhoun, McNair, & Seals, 2001). Female faculty and students reported that sexually harassing acts are pervasive on college campuses, and the majority of incidents were perpetrated by a colleague or fellow student (Frazier et al., 1995; Mazer & Percival, 1989; McKinney, 1990). Also, sexually harassing acts may have adverse consequences for both victims and perpetrators (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Sandler, 1997). For example, female victims of sexually harassing acts may experience increased psychological distress or stress-related illnesses (Crull, 1982; Gutek, Morasch, & Cohen, 1983) and may begin to fear relationships with men (Adams et al., 1983; Hughes & Sandler, 1988). Perpetrators may believe that sexual harassment and acts demeaning to women are acceptable behaviors (Shoop, 1997) after repeatedly engaging in the behaviors without experiencing penalties.

Applicable Models to the Study of Peer Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment in a university context occurs within a culture unique to that organizational context. Organizational culture refers to the understandings, behaviors, symbols, and norms that govern behavior among group members in a particular context (Dellinger & Williams, 2002). Some organizational cultures can be highly sexualized (e.g., the offices for a heterosexual pornographic magazine, or perhaps a radical feminist magazine). The particular environmental norms established within the organizational culture influence the organizational members' interpretations of acceptable and unacceptable sexually oriented behaviors. Thus, depending on the context, a poster on a wall of a woman in a sexually provocative pose may be deemed acceptable by a woman working in one organization and deemed unacceptable by a woman working in another.

Many universities have incorporated the aforementioned EEOC guidelines as a tool to reduce the pervasiveness of sexual harassment. However, there may be several environmental or organizational influences that simultaneously serve to facilitate sexually inappropriate behaviors on college campuses. For example, the typical college environment is often highly sexualized and may promote sexual activity between students. In fact, many traditional-age college students dress in clothing, listen to music, and speak in slang that is sexualized. These students often may be surrounded by systems (e.g., fraternities, sororities, and clubs) that support activities encouraging sexual activity (e.g., dances, parties, and bar nights). Since the incorporation of the EEOC guidelines of sexual harassment, many universities have highlighted behaviors, such as sexually oriented joke telling, as problematic and established such behaviors as inappropriate within the typical university organizational culture, regardless of how often they may occur.

Another important element in understanding the dynamics of sexual harassment in any organizational culture, including universities, is the perceptions of a potential perpetrator. At times, a male perpetrator may engage in a sexual behavior fully aware that it will be offensive to a woman. At other times, a male perpetrator may be unsure if the sexual behavior will be offensive to a woman; however, he still may be willing to take a chance that the behavior will not be offensive. Perhaps the perpetrator is willing to risk engaging in a potentially sexually harassing act, such as sexually oriented joke telling, because of the ambiguity regarding appropriate behavior in a particular organizational culture (e.g., a university laboratory and a college campus) (Fiske & Glick, 1995). It is not uncommon for a male perpetrator to be accused of sexual harassment when his intent was not to be impositional. Nevertheless, his insensitivity to the potential negative consequences of his behavior typically does not negate the act from being considered sexual harassment, at times even in a legal sense.

Over the years, there have been a variety of theories to account for sexual harassment (e.g., Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Gutek et al., 1983; Pryor, 1987; Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993; Stockdale & Hope, 1997; Stockdale,

Visio, & Batra, 1999; Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). Recently, researchers (Gutek & Done, 2001; Hall & Hirschman, 1991; Tangri & Hayes, 1997) have identified at least four broad explanatory models that could assist in explaining the causes of sexually harassing behaviors. These are: (1) natural/biological perspectives that describe sexual harassment as a natural attraction between two persons and a normal expression of sex drive, (2) organizational perspectives that describe sexual harassment as the result of particular characteristics or structures potentially created by an organization (e.g., gender role spillover and power), (3) sociocultural explanations that describe sexual harassment as an expression of the status differential between men and women that is inherent in society, and (4) individual differences perspectives that describe sexual harassment as an outcome of individual characteristics or personality influences.

Many of the recently developed models of sexual harassment (Hall & Hirschman, 1991) are not easily tested in the laboratory (Gutek & Done, 2001). Perhaps as a consequence, there is no clear-cut support for any one model. Given that sexual harassment occurs in a social context, it is likely that an accounting for individualistic behavior within a larger culture could serve as a useful component of most models of sexual harassment. From a social learning perspective, sexually impositional behaviors can be learned in interaction with others in a given social context. For example, individuals are more likely to accept or engage in sexually impositional behavior when they have frequent and close contact with others in a particular social context, who accept or engage in such behaviors (Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, & Bohmer, 1987).

Likewise, according to social comparison theory, behaviors are influenced by accessible social cues within organizational contexts, particularly when those contexts are ambiguous (Festinger, 1954; Sinclair, Lee, & Johnson, 1995). Thus, in a situation in which peer sexual harassment may occur, if a man is unsure about how to interact with a woman and is not provided with information about the woman's likes or dislikes, he may use available social cues from peers to assess the acceptability of engaging in a sexually harassing act (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; Sinclair et al., 1995). In support of this view, anticipation by one male participant of approval from a seemingly aggressive (nonsexual) peer, led to more aggression (nonsexual) by that male participant against another person than when the male participant anticipated approval from a seemingly nonaggressive peer (Borden, 1975). Perhaps, a peer sexually harassing act that occurs in an ambiguous situation (e.g., when a person is unclear about how to behave appropriately) also may be facilitated by a disinhibitory social comparison cue provided by a male peer.

LABORATORY PARADIGMS OF SEXUALLY IMPOSITIONAL BEHAVIORS

Recently, researchers have used a laboratory analogue to examine the effects of peer behaviors on subsequent sexually impositional acts by male college students (Mitchell, Angelone, Hirschman, Lilly, & Hall, 2002). Using the Hall and Hirschman (1994) sexual imposition laboratory paradigm, these researchers examined whether male college students who observed a peer engage in sexually impositional behavior were more likely to engage in a similar behavior than were male students who observed a peer engage in socially appropriate behavior. In the Mitchell et al. (2002) study, the sexually impositional stimulus was a set of video clips that contained either sexually aggressive or nonsexually aggressive content. The male students did not know if the sexual material would be offensive to women (as is often the case in real life situations); therefore, the act of showing the sexually oriented video clip was considered to be sexually impositional. It was predicted that sexually inappropriate peer modeling by a male peer subsequently would disinhibit male college students to engage a woman in a similar manner. Male students were significantly more likely to show the sexually oriented video clip to a female student after watching a peer model do the same than they were after watching a peer model show a female student the nonsexually oriented video clip. These results are consistent with prior findings that suggest that the behavior of college students may be affected by social cues from a peer observer or model (Borden, 1975; Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; Sinclair et al., 1995). Also, Mitchell et al. (2002) argued that, based on social comparison theory, peer behaviors are likely to play an important role in a decision to engage or not to engage in all forms of sexual imposition. Peers may have a disinhibiting effect on one's tendency to behave in a sexually impositional way, either through modeling or through implicit verbal approval of sexually impositional behavior.

More recently, a variation of the Hall and Hirschman (1994) laboratory paradigm has been

developed in Hirschman's laboratory that may allow for a more face valid approach to investigate peer sexual harassment among college students (Mitchell, Hirschman, Angelone, & Lilly, 2004). This new paradigm includes a situation in which student participants can engage in an act of peer sexual harassment common on college campuses. In this paradigm, male college students are given the opportunity to tell sexually oriented jokes to a female student confederate under the guise of a project on humor. The act of telling sexually oriented jokes to a female college student without knowing how she would perceive these jokes is conceptualized as an act of peer sexual harassment because this type of behavior has been repeatedly identified as a common and relatively serious form of peer sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Frazier et al., 1995; Hughes & Sandler, 1988; Shepela & Levesque, 1998), particularly in college settings.

The development of this new paradigm may have particular usefulness for the examination of sexually inappropriate behaviors in the college environment. As discussed above, traditional-age college students often may find themselves in a highly sexualized environment, with sexual comments and jokes as the norm. Male participants who enjoyed sexist humor were more likely to endorse rape-related attitudes and beliefs, as well as a likelihood of forcing sex and sexual aggression (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). For female participants, enjoyment of sexist humor was associated with their Adversarial Sexual Beliefs and Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). In addition, female participants who heard sexist jokes were more likely to report feeling angry, hostile, disgusted, and less amused than were participants who heard nonsexist jokes (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998). Thus, researchers have concluded that sexist jokes create a hostile environment that can negatively affect women, and telling such jokes should be viewed as a form of sexual harassment. Therefore, although a college environment can be highly sexualized, sexual joke telling can be a valuable stimulus and proxy for the study of peer sexual harassment, particularly for traditional-age college students in a college environment.

In addition to developing the joke telling paradigm, Mitchell et al. (2004) examined potential variables that could affect the expression of peer sexual harassment among college students. They proposed that the immediate environment might play a disinhibitory role much as it does in the expression of other kinds of unwanted sexual behaviors (Borden, 1975; Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; Pryor, 1987; Pryor et al., 1993; Sinclair et al., 1995). They also proposed that certain personality characteristics, which have been linked with sexually impositional behaviors in the real world, could influence sexually harassing behaviors among college students in the laboratory. In their study, greater sexually offensive joke telling was associated with exposure to a sexist environment (i.e., materials and decoration with a sexist content) as compared to a neutral environment (i.e., materials and decoration without sexist content). In addition, male students with high scores on the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale told more sexually offensive jokes than did male students with low scores on this scale. Also, male students exposed to the sexist environment who had high self-monitoring skills told fewer sexually offensive jokes than did male students exposed to the neutral environment. That sexually harassing behaviors in the laboratory may be influenced by the same factors that affect sexually impositional behaviors outside the laboratory may evidence a degree of external validity for the use of the Mitchell et al. laboratory analogue of peer sexual harassment (Mitchell et al., 2004).

Hypotheses

In the current study, we examined the effects of two different aspects of peer interaction on the expression of peer sexual harassment in college students, a population disproportionately affected by peer sexual harassment cohorts (Corbin et al., 2001). In addition, the present study was an attempt to validate this laboratory paradigm further, as there have been few attempts to use a joke telling paradigm to examine peer sexual harassment. In the first experiment, the effect of peer modeling on sexual harassment was examined using the Mitchell et al. (2004) laboratory paradigm. Experiment 1 was designed to determine whether there is a basic effect of peer interaction on sexually oriented joke telling under conditions that presumably would maximize the likelihood that male college students would tell sexually oriented jokes. It was predicted that male college students exposed to a peer model who engaged in sexually oriented joke telling subsequently would tell significantly more sexually oriented jokes to a female confederate (in the presence of the male peer) than would male college students exposed to a peer model who did not engage in sexually oriented joke telling. In Experiment 2, the focus was on whether sexist

attitudes, not actual modeling behavior, could serve as a stimulus of social comparison and subsequently translate into an increase in sexually inappropriate behaviors. It was predicted that male college students exposed to a verbally sexist peer would subsequently tell more sexually oriented jokes to a female confederate (in the presence of the male peer) than would male college students exposed to a verbally nonsexist peer.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Participants

Participants were 49 male undergraduates who volunteered for the experiment as one of several options for meeting the requirements of a general psychology course at a large midwestern university. The data from eight participants were omitted in the analyses due to either (1) problems with the accuracy of the experimenter and confederate scripts or (2) the participants correctly guessed some aspects of the experiment or hypotheses, as verbally stated to the experimenter or through a written answer to the manipulation check after the experiment. The mean age of the 41 participants included in the analyses was 19.3 ($SD = 1.6$) and ranged from 18 to 26 years. No data were collected with respect to ethnic background. However, enrollment records from the university where this research was conducted indicate that 86% of undergraduates identified themselves as European American and 8% as African American, 1% as Asian, and 1% as Hispanic.

Materials

Pilot research was conducted in an attempt to improve the overall validity of the Mitchell et al. (2004) paradigm by increasing the pool of potential jokes that were psychometrically sound and that could be used in Experiments 1 and 2. Initially, the jokes were gathered from a variety of sources and selected for pilot research because they were judged to be roughly equally humorous and to fall into the categories of clean, gross, or sexually oriented. After we selected 80 preliminary jokes, a total of 55 male and female undergraduates evaluated the humorousness of the jokes and categorized them. Each participant was provided with a questionnaire that contained a random set of 40 of the total 80 jokes. Before evaluating the jokes, participants signed a consent form in which they were informed that some of the jokes may be objectionable. Furthermore, they were informed that they could withdraw from the experiment prior to or during the viewing the jokes and they would still receive full credit for their participation. A range of 25–28 participants evaluated each joke. On each questionnaire, participants were asked to rate each joke's humorousness on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not funny" (a rating of 1) to "very funny" (a rating of 5), and then were asked to categorize each joke as either "clean," "gross," or "sexually oriented." Although we were specifically interested in finding jokes from the aforementioned categories, participants were also given the opportunity to classify jokes in an "other" category if they thought the jokes did not fit one of the three categories chosen by the researchers. As no statistical differences were found on humorousness ratings by gender, scores were analyzed by combining men's and women's responses.

Only jokes that had an 80% or higher level of agreement on their category membership (clean, gross, or sexually oriented) were retained. Once the categories for these jokes were determined, we subjectively chose 15 jokes that were approximately at the average humorousness rating and excluded those jokes that were rated at the extreme ends of the humorousness continuum. Based on these analyses, five jokes from each of three categories (clean, gross, and sexually oriented) were chosen for a total 15 jokes.

The five sexually oriented jokes from the final list of 15 jokes were used as the primary stimuli for Experiment 1. In Experiment 1, the five jokes were presented to participants in a questionnaire format, such that each joke was listed in a predetermined randomized order, followed by a short question. This question asked participants to rate the humorousness of each joke on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not funny" (a rating of 1) to "really funny" (a rating of 4). This questionnaire format was meant to focus the attention of participants on the material and to promote the emphasis of the study as being about "humor" rather than sexual harassment.

Procedure

Male participants were recruited for the generic study title of "Sense of Humor and Joke Telling,"

which was used to prevent the participants from determining the actual purpose of the experiment. The participants completed the procedure individually. Upon their arrival at the laboratory, they were randomly assigned to either a "sexually harassing" peer model condition or a "nonsexually harassing" peer model condition (see below for a description). Within each condition, each participant was randomly paired with a male confederate (the peer model) who posed as another male participant. Three different male students alternately served as the male confederate for the experiment. Of the 41 participants whose data were used for analysis, 21 were exposed to the nonsexually harassing peer model condition, and 20 were exposed to the sexually harassing peer model condition.

The experimenter initially greeted the male participant and the paired male confederate in a lounge area. They were informed that the purpose of the experiment was to examine sense of humor and joke telling ability. They were told that each of them would be paired with a different student (i.e., a female confederate) with whom they would be interacting later in the experiment. Also, they were told that they would be asked to complete several tasks such as evaluating a list of jokes and telling some of the jokes to an "audience." (In fact, this audience was a female confederate). Also, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time and still receive full credit for their participation.

After this initial meeting, the participant and the male confederate were escorted to a laboratory room that contained a table and a chair in which the two "other students" (i.e., two female confederates) would each take a turn listening to the jokes while the participant and male confederate would be in the room next door telling the jokes. The experimenter also pointed out that there was a window between the two rooms (i.e., a one-way mirror). The experimenter noted that during the joke telling, the participants would be able to see the audience; however, the person serving as the audience would be unable to see them. A small hole in the wall (approximately 6 inches by 6 inches), which served as ventilation between the two rooms, was situated below the one-way mirror. Although the experimenter never explicitly pointed out the hole, the location of the hole below the focal point and the ability of the participants to see the confederate in the other room were assumed to facilitate the notion that the female confederates would be able to hear the jokes being told. Occasionally some participants asked the experimenter if the female confederate could, in fact, hear the jokes and the experimenter responded in the affirmative.

The experimenter then escorted the participant and male confederate to the laboratory room next door, which was decorated like an office. A poster of the "Three Stooges" and a sign that said "Humor Project" covered the door to the laboratory. The laboratory was undecorated and contained two student desks and one larger desk for the experimenter. The student desks were situated to insure that the participant sat near the experimenter during each session. This location facilitated the participant taking part in the "turn-selection" procedure (see below).

The participant and the male confederate then were presented with the stimulus questionnaire that contained the five sexually oriented jokes. This questionnaire was preceded by the consent form and a cover sheet notifying participants that the jokes they were about to read may be objectionable. Participants were asked verbally if they felt comfortable with such material and if so, to sign the consent form. As previously mentioned, participants had the option of leaving the experiment at any time and receiving full credit for their participation even before seeing the sexually oriented jokes. Participants were also told that if they became uncomfortable at any point in the future they could also withdraw from the study and still receive full credit for their participation. Next, the participant and the male confederate were asked to rate the humorousness of each joke. The purpose of the questionnaire was to familiarize participants with the jokes and, again, to emphasize that the experiment was about "sense of humor and joke telling." After the participant and male confederate completed this questionnaire, the experimenter told them that they would be asked to try to make another student laugh by telling some jokes from the list. The experimenter then presented a hat that contained two slips of paper given first to the participant to draw. Both slips of paper indicated a "second turn" selection that insured that the male confederate would tell the jokes first.

After choosing the order of joke telling, the experimenter left the room in order to "set up the partner (female confederate) in the other room to serve as an audience for joke telling." Given that the participant would require a female confederate who had seemingly not heard the jokes before, each session included two female confederates—one to serve as an audience for the participant and the

other to serve as an audience for the male confederate. Six different female students alternately served as confederates for the male participants. Upon returning to the laboratory room, the experimenter dimmed the room lights and exposed the one-way mirror by opening two shutters. The dim lights facilitated the use of the one-way mirror and also enhanced the feeling of anonymity associated with the joke telling. The experimenter then told the male confederate to "try to make the other student laugh" by verbally telling her one to five jokes from the stimulus questionnaire, with the option of not telling her any jokes. The participant witnessed this interaction and the subsequent behavior of the confederate.

In the sexually harassing peer model condition, the male confederate chose to tell all five of the sexually oriented jokes to the female confederate. In the nonsexually harassing peer model condition, the male confederate chose not to tell any of the sexually oriented jokes to the female confederate. The female confederates were all previously instructed to remain attentive and maintain a light smile on their faces during the joke telling. They were told not to laugh or frown at any of the jokes, in order to prevent the participants from receiving any cues as to the number of jokes to tell.

After the male confederate completed the joke telling part of the experiment, the experimenter closed the shutters to cover the one-way mirror and returned the lights to normal power. The experimenter then reminded the participant that it was his turn to tell jokes. The experimenter then excused himself a second time in order to set up the participant's partner in the other room to serve as an audience for the joke telling. Again, this other student was a female confederate, and she was always a different person than the female confederate who served as an audience for the male confederate. Upon the experimenter's return to the room, he again dimmed the room lights and exposed the one-way mirror by opening the two shutters. The experimenter then told the male participant to "try to make the other student laugh" by verbally telling her one to five jokes from the stimulus questionnaire, with the option of not telling her any jokes. The male confederate remained in the room during the participant's joke telling.

After the participant completed the joke telling part of the experiment, the experimenter closed the shutters and returned the lights to normal power. The experimenter then asked the participant and the male confederate to complete a short questionnaire. This questionnaire queried the participants' thoughts about the female audience's reaction to the selected jokes, how comfortable they felt during the joke telling interaction, how aversive they thought the jokes were, and several other filler questions intended to maintain the project's focus on "joke telling and humor." Participants also were asked about their knowledge of the purpose of the experiment in order to determine if they had some awareness about the methods or hypotheses of the experiment. After completing this questionnaire, participants received a verbal and written debriefing statement that contained an educational statement about offensive joke telling outside of the laboratory situation, and they were encouraged to attend a more comprehensive debriefing session at the end of the semester.

Results

Overall, participants chose to tell a mean of 2.5 sexually oriented jokes ($SD = 1.9$). However, the number of jokes told by male participants collapsed across the two peer modeling conditions varied a great deal. Some participants chose not to tell any sexually oriented jokes, and some participants chose to tell the maximum of five sexually oriented jokes over the course of their joke telling trials. Twenty-four percent of the participants chose not to tell any of the sexually oriented jokes to the female confederate; 12% of the participants told one joke, 10% told two jokes, 20% told three jokes, 12% told four jokes, and 22% told all five jokes.

A 3 (male confederate) $\times$ 6 (female confederate) analysis of variance was conducted using the number of sexually oriented jokes told by the male participants as the dependent variable. This analysis indicated that sexually oriented joke telling did not differ significantly by which male confederate or female confederate was present during the experiment.

For each joke, the ratings of humorousness by the male participants were on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not funny" (a rating of 1) to "really funny" (a rating of 4). Participants' humor ratings for each of the five sexually oriented jokes were averaged to determine their overall reaction to the jokes. Overall, the mean rating of the sexually oriented jokes for all participants was 2.5 ($SD = 0.66$). A Pearson product-moment correlational analysis revealed no relationship between the humor ratings and number of jokes told by participants.

Participants responded to the question "how aversive did you think the jokes were" on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not at all aversive" (a rating of 1) to "very aversive" (a rating of 5). Overall, participants tended to describe the five sexually oriented jokes as aversive, with a mean rating of 3.5 ($SD = 1.2$). In fact, 24% of participants rated the jokes as "very aversive;" only 5% of participants rated the jokes as "not at all aversive."

A *t*-test, on the effect of the type of peer model (sexually harassing versus nonsexually harassing) on sexually oriented joke telling among participants was significant, $t(39) = 5.44$, $p < .01$. Participants exposed to the sexually harassing peer model told significantly more sexually oriented jokes ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.5$) than did participants exposed to the nonsexually harassing peer model ($M = 1.3$, $SD = 1.4$). The effect size for this comparison was large by Cohen's (1992) guidelines ($d = 1.6$).

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

Participants

Participants were 46 male undergraduates who volunteered for the experiment as one of several options for meeting the requirements of a general psychology course at a large midwestern university. The data from six participants were omitted in all analyses due to either (1) problems with the accuracy of the experimenter and confederate scripts or (2) the participants correctly guessed some aspects of the experiment or hypotheses, as verbally stated to the experimenter or through a written answer to the manipulation check after the experiment. The mean age of the 40 participants included in the analyses was 19.6 ($SD = 1.4$) and ranged from 18 to 24 years. With respect to ethnic background, 85% identified themselves as European American, 7.5% as African American, and 7.5% chose not to respond or identified themselves as coming from a mixed ethnic background.

Materials

The primary stimuli for Experiment 2 were the 15 jokes developed after pilot testing as described in Experiment 1. The list of 15 jokes included five jokes from three different categories (i.e., clean, gross, and sexually oriented). The use of 15 jokes provided participants with the opportunity to tell jokes from any one category (e.g., five clean jokes) or jokes from different categories if they felt uncomfortable telling jokes from a particular category. The 15 jokes were presented to participants in a questionnaire format, such that each joke was listed in a predetermined randomized order, followed by two short questions. The first question asked participants to rate the humorousness of the joke on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not funny" (a rating of 1) to "really funny" (a rating of 4). The second question asked participants to assess the importance of several factors in the successful telling of jokes (i.e., comedic timing, voice delivery, and facial expressions/hand gestures). This questionnaire format was meant to focus the attention of the participants to the material and to promote the emphasis of the study as being on "humor" rather than sexual harassment.

Procedure

The generic study title of "Humor on the College Campus" was used to prevent the participants from determining the actual purpose of the experiment. Participants completed the procedure individually. Upon their arrival at the laboratory, they were randomly assigned to either a "sexist" peer interaction condition or a "nonsexist" peer interaction condition (see below for description). Within each condition, each participant was randomly paired with a male confederate (the male peer) who posed as another participant. Two different students alternately served as the male confederate for the experiment. Of the 40 participants whose data were used for analysis, 20 were exposed to the nonsexist peer interaction condition, and 20 were exposed to the sexist peer interaction condition.

The experimenter initially greeted the participant and the paired male confederate in a lounge area. They were informed that the purpose of the experiment was to examine sense of humor and joke telling ability. They were told that they would be asked to complete several tasks, such as watching and evaluating a video clip, evaluating a list of jokes, and telling some jokes to an audience. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time and still receive full credit for their participation.

The participant and male confederate were escorted to a laboratory room decorated like an office. A poster of the "Three Stooges" and a sign that said "Humor Project" covered the door to the laboratory. The laboratory contained a TV/VCR combination unit, two student desks, an empty chair, and one larger desk for the experimenter. The male confederate was instructed to sit at the desk that would insure that the participant sat near the experimenter and away from the empty chair during each session. The room also was decorated with a variety of movie posters that were neutral in regard to sexuality (e.g., advertisements for recent movies that did not depict women as sex objects). One of the posters included the actress Sandra Bullock in a nonsexual pose with a male actor.

After settling, the participant and the male confederate were presented with the consent form. Prior to signing this form, they were notified by the experimenter that they were about to view a video clip that would contain profanity. In addition, they were told that the jokes that they would subsequently read might be objectionable. Participants were asked verbally if they felt comfortable with such material and if so, to sign the consent form. As previously mentioned, participants had the option of leaving the experiment at any time and receiving full credit for their participation even before seeing the video clip and the jokes. Participants were also told that if they became uncomfortable at any point in the future they could also withdraw from the study and still receive full credit for their participation.

The participant and male confederate then were asked to watch a brief video clip of a standup comedian displayed on the TV/VCR. The brief clip of the standup comedian included material that pertained to daily life events. Upon completion, the participant and the male confederate were given a questionnaire that asked them to rate the humor of the comedian's material and to answer other filler questions. The purpose of this task was to substantiate that the experiment was about "humor on the college campus."

The participant and the male confederate were next presented with the stimulus questionnaire that contained the 15 jokes. As with experiment one, this questionnaire was preceded by a cover sheet notifying participants that the jokes they were about to read may be objectionable. Participants were told that if they felt uncomfortable with such material they could withdraw from the study and still receive full credit for their participation. As previously mentioned, participants had the option of leaving the experiment at any time and receiving full credit for their participation even before seeing the jokes. Participants were also told that if they became uncomfortable at any point in the future they could withdraw from the study and still receive full credit for their participation. The participant and the male confederate were asked to rate the humorousness of each joke and the importance of several factors in successfully telling jokes (e.g., comedic timing, voice inflection).

After the participant and the male confederate completed this questionnaire, the experimenter told them that they would be asked to try to make another student laugh by telling some jokes from the list. At this point, the experimenter excused himself to "go find his assistant (female confederate) to serve as an audience for joke telling" and left the room. While the experimenter was out of the room, the male confederate began talking with the participant. The male confederate served one of two roles during this phase of the experiment; the roles were predetermined and randomly chosen for each session. In the sexist peer interaction condition, the male confederate talked with the participant in a manner that was "dehumanizing" toward women. His scripted conversation included "*Man, Sandra Bullock* (looks at poster) *is so hot. I wish I could get some of that. Chicks on campus really suck. They never put out.*" In the nonsexist peer interaction condition, the male confederate remained positive toward women. His conversation was again scripted and included "*Man, Sandra Bullock* (looks at poster) *is really pretty, and she seems real smart too. I've met a lot of girls like that on campus. They all seem pretty cool."*

After this conversation took place, the experimenter returned to the room with the female assistant. At this point, the experimenter, female confederate, male confederate, and the male participant were all in the same room. The experimenter then indicated that the male confederate and the participant were to select five jokes from the previous questionnaire to tell the female assistant to try to make her laugh. The experimenter then presented a hat that contained two slips of paper; the hat was given first to the participant to draw a slip. Both slips of paper indicated a "first turn" selection that insured that the participant would tell the jokes first. The female confederates were all instructed to remain attentive and maintain a light smile on their faces during the joke telling. They were told not to laugh or frown at any of the jokes in order to prevent the participants from receiving any cues as to the type of jokes to tell.

The male confederate remained in the room while the participant told the jokes.

After the participant completed the joke telling to the female confederate, the experimenter asked the participant to collect his things, in order to be taken to another room to complete a short questionnaire. This questionnaire queried the participants' thoughts about the female audience's reaction to the selected jokes, how comfortable they felt during the joke telling interaction, and several other filler questions intended to maintain the project's integrity as being about "joke telling and humor." Participants also were asked about their knowledge of the purpose of the experiment in order to determine if they had some awareness about the methods or hypotheses of the experiment. After completing this questionnaire, participants received a verbal and written debriefing statement that contained an educational statement about offensive joke telling outside of the laboratory situation, and they were encouraged to attend a more comprehensive debriefing session at the end of the semester.

RESULTS

The number of sexually oriented jokes told by male participants appears to be skewed. Most participants chose not to tell four or more sexually oriented jokes. In fact, no participant chose to tell five sexually oriented jokes, and only 3% chose to tell four sexually oriented jokes. On the other hand, 23% chose to tell zero sexually oriented jokes, 30% told one sexually oriented joke, 35% told two sexually oriented jokes, and only 10% of the participants chose to tell three sexually oriented jokes.

A series of 2 (male confederate) $\times$ 3 (female assistant) analyses of variance were conducted using the number of clean, gross, and sexually oriented jokes told by the male participants as the dependent variables. These analyses indicated that clean, gross, and sexually oriented joke telling did not differ significantly by which male confederate or female assistant was present during the experiment.

The ratings of the jokes' humorousness by the participants were on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not funny" (a rating of 1) to "really funny" (a rating of 4). Participants' humor ratings of the jokes were summed for each category (clean, gross, and sexually oriented) and then averaged in order to determine the overall reaction to each joke category. Each category could theoretically average from 5 (which would indicate that every participant gave every joke in the category the lowest possible rating) to 20 (which would indicate that every participant gave every joke in the category the highest possible rating). The clean category of jokes had a mean of 10.4 ($SD = 2.5$); the gross category had a mean of 11.6 ($SD = 2.6$); the sexually oriented category had a mean of 13.7 ($SD = 2.3$). Differences among these mean ratings were compared using *t*-tests. In accordance with the Bonferroni procedure, an alpha of .017 (.05/3) was used for each comparison to maintain family wise error rate at .05. The sexually oriented joke category received a higher mean rating than did either the gross joke category, $t(39) = 5.14, p < .017$, or the clean joke category, $t(39) = -7.50, p < .017$. In addition, the gross joke category received a higher mean rating than the clean joke category did, $t(39) = 2.55, p < .017$.

Of the combined 200 total jokes told by participants, 39% were from the clean category, 33% were from the gross category, and 28% were from the sexually oriented category. In order to determine if joke telling differed by category, *t*-tests were used to compare the average number of particular type of jokes told. In accordance with the Bonferroni procedure, an alpha of .017 (.05/3) was used for each comparison to maintain the family wise error rate at .05. Participants told a mean of 2.0 ($SD = 1.0$) clean jokes, a mean of 1.7 ($SD = 1.0$) gross jokes, and a mean of 1.4 ($SD = 1.0$) sexually oriented jokes. The analyses indicated that there were no significant differences in overall joke telling by category type.

The effect of the type of peer interaction (sexist or nonsexist) on sexually oriented joke telling among participants was significant, $t(38) = 2.63, p = .01$. Participants exposed to the sexist peer interaction told significantly more sexually oriented jokes ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.0$) than did participants exposed to the nonsexist peer interaction ($M = 1.0$, $SD = .90$). The effect size for this comparison was large by Cohen's (1992) guidelines ($d = .80$). There were no statistical differences in clean or gross joke telling among participants as a function of peer interaction condition.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the present study we examined the effects of two variants of a potentially important situational variable in a college environment, student peer interaction on peer sexual harassment, using a joke

telling paradigm. In Experiment 1, the effect of a peer interaction on sexually harassing behavior was examined under maximally favorable conditions for joke telling. In Experiment 2, a face valid approach was used to examine the impact of peer sexist attitudes, rather than peer sexually harassing behavior, on male students' tendencies to behave in a sexually harassing manner. Perhaps male students are more frequently exposed to peer sexist attitudes than to peer sexually harassing behavior in situations where they might engage in sexually harassing behavior. The laboratory setup in Experiment 2 also reduced the degree of anonymity provided to participants in Experiment 1. Finally, the situation in Experiment 2 provided a choice of the particular types of jokes participants could tell, rather than reducing the repertoire to a limited subset of sexually oriented jokes, as in Experiment 1.

A significant relationship was found between the type of peer interaction and sexually oriented joke telling behavior in both experiments. During Experiment 1, when male college students were exposed to a peer model who engaged in sexually oriented joke telling, the male students subsequently told more sexually oriented jokes to a female confederate (in the male confederate's presence) than they did when they were exposed to a peer model who did not engage in sexually oriented joke telling. During Experiment 2, when male students were exposed to a peer who was verbally sexist, the male students subsequently told more sexually oriented jokes to a female confederate (in the male confederate's presence) than they did when they were exposed to a peer who was not verbally sexist. The finding in Experiment 1 suggests that the behavior of a male student peer can have a potentially important effect on subsequent sexually impositional behavior by other male students. The finding in Experiment 2 suggests that when a male student peer states sexist attitudes, but does not actually model sexist behavior, that may be sufficient to influence subsequent peer sexually impositional behavior by other male students.

The experimental findings also suggest that the Mitchell et al. (2004) laboratory paradigm may have better face validity than do previous analogues of sexual imposition in which other stimuli were used. First, the telling of sexually oriented jokes as a type of sexual impositional behavior may mimic real world behaviors more aptly than do showing sexually oriented video clips or sexually explicit slides (Hall & Hirschman, 1993, 1994; Mitchell et al., 2004). Second, sexist jokes may be rated as more aversive than nonsexist jokes (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998). Consistent with these data, in Experiment 1 a large portion of male college students believed that the sexually oriented jokes were aversive.

Sexual imposition appears to be a behavior that is committed by relatively few men; the majority of men generally abstain from such behaviors (Hall, Hirschman, & Oliver, 1994; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Mitchell et al., 2002). Consistent with previous research, in the current experiments, the tendency for male college students was to tell relatively few sexually oriented jokes to a woman. In Experiment 1, 34% of the participants chose to tell four or five sexually oriented jokes to a female confederate under anonymous conditions. In Experiment 2, fewer than 3% of the participants chose to tell four or five sexually oriented jokes when the female confederate was in the room with the participant. Thus, these data may provide potential evidence of external validity for the use of the Mitchell et al. (2004) laboratory analogue of peer sexual harassment with college students.

Closer inspection of the data highlights the influence of peer interactions on male college students' subsequent sexually impositional behavior. For example, in Experiment 1, participants told almost three times the number of sexually oriented jokes when exposed to a peer model who engaged in sexually oriented joke telling as they did when they were exposed to a peer model who did not engage in sexually oriented joke telling. In Experiment 2, participants told almost twice the number of sexually oriented jokes when exposed to a verbally sexist peer interaction as they did when they were exposed to a verbally nonsexist peer interaction. Therefore, although there may be a tendency for male college students to tell few sexually oriented jokes to a female student, prior exposure to a peer who engaged in sexually impositional behavior or expressed sexist attitudes may increase the likelihood that male students will subsequently engage in that behavior.

Peer interactions among male college students may have disinhibitory effects on sexually oriented joke telling because of the perceived social approval of the act, as a potential perpetrator may look to peers for acceptable attitudes and behaviors in ambiguous situations (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; Festinger, 1954; Sinclair et al., 1995). The current study is the first known examination of peer interaction effects on a pervasive form of sexually impositional behavior (i.e., peer sexual harassment) among

college students, a population in which peer sexual harassment is relatively common. The current findings also are unique in that a peer who simply verbalizes sexist attitudes, as opposed to actively modeling sexually inappropriate behavior, can increase the likelihood that male college students will engage in sexually impositional behavior.

One possible alternate explanation for the research findings could be that the number of sexually oriented jokes told by the participants was based on the humorousness of the particular jokes. However, in Experiment 1, no relationship was found between the mean humor ratings of each of the five sexually oriented jokes and the total number of jokes told by the male college students. Also, in Experiment 2, although the participants found the sexually oriented jokes to be more humorous than either the clean and gross jokes, there were no differences in overall joke telling by category type. Therefore, it appears that the participants chose the jokes with other factors in mind, such as, the impact of the interaction with the male confederate.

One limitation of the study concerns the use of a laboratory analogue of sexually impositional behavior. From an ethical perspective, the use of a laboratory analogue to study sexual harassment among college students has some advantages over a field study, if one is interested in controlling relevant variables. However, the increase in internal validity of a laboratory analogue always is balanced by the potential decrease in external validity. Perhaps the use of this paradigm also reduces the degree of spontaneity associated with real world behaviors. As such, it is unknown if the laboratory analogue precisely duplicates a real world situation that involves peer sexual harassment. However, it does allow for an investigation of this important area in a controlled environment. In a related vein, the use of the particular stimulus jokes in these experiments represents a very limited range of the jokes available in real world settings. Although efforts were made by the researchers to find equally humorous jokes from three distinct categories that seemed appropriate for college students, the college students may have perceived the jokes differently than initially intended (e.g., some jokes may have been popular or mainstream). Another limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings beyond that of college-aged men from a large midwestern university. It is unknown whether similar results would be found using a community-based sample or a sample of individuals from a different age cohort or from a university in a different geographical location. Nevertheless, peer sexual imposition is a pervasive problem on college campuses that can have serious consequences, particularly for female students (Adams et al., 1983; Denmark et al., 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 1988), and we believe that some information about its causes can best be obtained by studying it in a controlled laboratory environment. In addition, although college students may interact in a variety of organizational contexts, these studies did not explicitly create an organizational culture beyond the general university culture. Thus, as with all experiments, the generalization of the results of our studies to other contexts is limited by the parameters of our experiments and the organizational culture of our participants.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the behavior and attitudes of a male peer can influence the likelihood that male college students will behave in a potentially sexually harassing manner toward female peers. The results also suggest that the Mitchell et al. (2004) paradigm may be a viable analogue for the examination of peer sexual harassment. We hope that further validation of this paradigm will include replication studies and paradigm enhancement through an examination of correlations between real world peer sexual harassment behaviors by college students and those behaviors studied in the laboratory. Additional specific organizational and personality variables also could be identified and examined in the paradigm to facilitate understanding of the interplay of multiple factors that likely affect peer sexually harassing behavior, including inhibitory factors, so that appropriate and useful social policies and prevention programs can be developed.

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