Psychology of Women Quarterly, **28** (2004), 194–203. Blackwell Publishing. Printed in the USA.

A LABORATORY ANALOGUE FOR THE STUDY OF PEER SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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The purpose of this study was to develop a laboratory analogue for the study of peer sexual harassment, and to examine person and situational factors associated with male on female peer sexual harassment. One hundred twenty-two male participants were given the opportunity to tell jokes to a female confederate from a joke list that included sexually offensive jokes, as well as other types of jokes. Participants were exposed to either a sexist laboratory environment or a neutral laboratory environment during the study. Eighty percent of participants told at least one sexually offensive joke to a female confederate. Higher scores on a measure of adversarial sexual beliefs were associated with telling a greater number of sexually offensive jokes. The results suggest that the joke-telling analogue may be a useful means for laboratory explorations of person and situational factors associated with peer sexual harassment.

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a laboratory analogue to study sexually harassing behavior between peers, and within that paradigm, to examine several potentially important person and situational factors that may be related to this form of sexually harassing behavior. Laboratory analogues have been developed to examine factors associated with sexual assault and forms of sexual harassment that occur within overt power relationships, such as when a male employer uses his organizational power to make sexual demands to a female employee (Hall & Hirschman, 1994; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Although sexual harassment between peers has been identified as the most common form of sexually aggressive behavior (Frazier, Cochran, & Olson, 1995), there are no known laboratory analogues targeting common forms of peer sexual harassment that mimic in vivo situations discussed in the literature.

Varieties of Sexual Harassment

The widely accepted sexual harassment guidelines developed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the American Association of University Professors distinguish between two broad types of sexual harassment: (a) quid pro quo harassment and (b) hostile environment harassment (Fitzgerald, 1996; Keyton, 1996). Quid pro quo harassment refers to instances in which an individual attempts to use his or her organizational power over a subordinate to engage in sexual activity (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991). Hostile environment harassment refers to persistent sexual advances, sexual comments, or other unwanted sexual attention in the workplace or academic setting (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991). Hostile environment harassment differs from quid pro quo harassment in that the victim does not have to submit to sexual activity for a reward or to avoid a punishment. It also differs from quid pro quo harassment in that the victim and perpetrator may have a supervisor/subordinate relationship or equal status relationship.

A common but relatively unexamined form of hostile environment sexual harassment is peer sexual harassment (Ivy & Hamlet, 1996). This term specifically refers to sexually harassing behavior between people in a particular context who do not have an overt power relationship. For example, the victim and perpetrator may be students or coworkers. This form of sexual harassment typically involves behaviors such as sexually offensive comments, sexually offensive jokes, ogling, and unwanted touching (Hughes & Sandler, 1988; Mazer & Percival, 1989; Sandler, 1997). Large-scale surveys of sexual harassment in the workplace have found that the majority of sexually harassing incidents occur between colleagues rather than supervisors and subordinates (Gutek, 1985; Keyton, 1996; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981). In surveys on college campuses, upwards of 70% of female students reported experiencing sexually

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The authors wish to thank Jamie Lewis and Jennifer Kohler for their assistance with the data collection for this project.

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harassing behaviors perpetrated by male students (Hughes & Sandler, 1988; Shepela & Levesque, 1998). In contrast, around 5% of female students reported incidents of quid pro quo harassment perpetrated by male faculty (Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986; Shepela & Levesque, 1998). Despite this difference in frequency, it has been found that sexually harassing behavior perpetrated by faculty and students were rated as equally upsetting to victims (Frazier et al., 1995).

The Development of Laboratory Paradigms Relevant to Sexual Harassment

The challenge in developing a laboratory analogue of peer sexual harassment, as with analogues of other kinds of sexually impositional behavior, is the search for a design and stimulus that are ethical and comparable to real-world forms of sexual harassment. In one of the few reported laboratory analogues of sexually impositional behavior, Hall and Hirschman (1994) created a video-showing paradigm in which male participants viewed several video clips and chose one to show to a female confederate. The video-showing paradigm has been a useful means of examining such factors as the influence of peers and misogynist messages on sexually aggressive behavior (Barongan & Hall, 1995; Mitchell, Angelone, Hirschman, Lilly, & Hall, 2002). Similar to the video-showing paradigm, a "computer harassment" paradigm was developed in which men were given the opportunity to anonymously send pornographic pictures to women via the Internet (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999). However, showing a sexually violent video clip or sending pornographic photos is still far removed from common sexually impositional behaviors in real-life settings.

Pryor and colleagues (Pryor, 1987; Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995) also have provided seminal work in the area of sexually impositional analogues with the creation of paradigms of quid pro quo harassment. In these studies, male participants were given a sense of power over a female confederate and some men were asked to perform tasks that presented opportunities to touch the confederate. For example, in one study male participants were instructed to train a female confederate to putt a golf ball (Pryor, 1987). In another study, male participants were instructed to lead a blindfolded female confederate around a room and evaluate her on a variety of dimensions ostensibly related to her candidacy for a job with the visually impaired (Pryor et al., 1995). In these studies, sexual harassment was defined as the confederate's report of the frequency with which the male participants touched parts of her body. The kinds of behaviors demonstrated by participants in these studies (e.g., touching and leering) are similar to sexually harassing behaviors in real-world settings. However, several potential problems may exist with this procedure, including exposing a female confederate to a potentially dangerous situation, as well as the subjective and potentially unreliable confederate ratings of sexual touching that served as the dependent measure.

The present study attempted to build upon prior analogues with the creation of a laboratory paradigm in which participants could engage in a real-world act of peer sexual harassment, the telling of sexually offensive jokes. During the course of the present study, male participants were given the opportunity to tell up to five sexually offensive jokes to a female confederate. Participants did not know how the female confederate would perceive these jokes. Telling a sexually offensive joke to a woman in this manner was 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; Shepela & Levesuqe, 1998).

Applying a Person X Situation Model to a New Analogue of Peer Sexual Harassment

While there is no conceptual model unique to peer sexual harassment, sexual aggression in general has been conceptualized as a behavior that can be understood using a person X situation model (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Hall & Hirschman, 1994; Pryor et al., 1993). The extent to which this model applies to peer sexual harassment is explored in the present study. According to this type of model, sexual harassment is a product of factors within the perpetrator and factors within the environment.

The study of person factors associated with perpetrators of common forms of peer sexual harassment is still in its infancy. However, if research on quid pro quo harassment and sexual assault is applicable to peer sexual harassment, then strong adversarial sexual beliefs and weak perspective-taking ability may be linked with peer sexual harassment (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987). Other factors that have been linked to sexual harassment in the literature are sexist beliefs and low self-monitoring ability (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). The present study examined these four factors in relation to peer sexual harassment.

Adversarial sexual beliefs refer to a perspective on male–female relationships as combative in nature, and characterized by manipulation, exploitation, and a lack of trust (Burt, 1980). This variable's relationship to sexual harassment has been supported by positive correlations between scores on the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale (Burt, 1980) and the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale, which assesses a man's proclivity to engage in quid pro quo forms of sexual harassment toward a woman (Pryor, 1987). Strong adversarial sexual beliefs also have been associated with engaging in severe sexually aggressive behavior such as rape (Malamuth, 1986; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). Although the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale has been reconceptualized since its original formulation (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1996), we chose to include the original scale

in this project to facilitate comparison between our findings and those of other analogue studies that have examined this variable using the original scale.

Perspective taking can be defined as the capacity to adopt another person's point of view and discriminate another person's emotional experience (Roys, 1997). This variable has been hypothesized to disinhibit sexually aggressive individuals, allowing them to aggress without consideration of the harm caused by their actions (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987). This variable's relationship to sexual harassment has been supported by negative correlations between measures of perspective taking and measures that assess the proclivity to engage in sexual harassment (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987).

Sexism has been hypothesized to be associated with engaging in sexually harassing behavior (Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Research on correlates of sexist attitudes has found that high scores on the Modern Sexism Scale have been associated with decreased sensitivity in identifying incidents of sexual harassment, decreased sympathy for victims of sexual harassment, and recommending less punishment for perpetrators of sexual harassment (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Given that the content of common forms of peer sexual harassment, such as sexually offensive comments and jokes, stereotype and portray women as sexual objects, sexist attitudes also may be a factor associated with engaging in peer sexual harassment.

Sexually harassing behavior also has been hypothesized to reflect a lack of self-monitoring (i.e., the extent to which people observe and control their self-presentation; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Individuals who are high on the dimension of self-monitoring are thought to monitor their outward presentation according to the social situation. They are sensitive to social and interpersonal cues and generally engage in situationally appropriate behavior. Individuals who are low on the dimension of self-monitoring are not adept at monitoring their self-presentation. Instead, their social behavior reflects their own inner states at the expense of being situationally appropriate (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). It has been hypothesized in the literature that high self-monitoring men may be less likely to make unwelcome sexual advances or sexually offensive remarks than low self-monitoring men (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). One study found that low self-monitoring men were more easily persuaded than high self-monitoring men to engage in a sexually harassing behavior in the laboratory toward a female victim that espoused egalitarian gender-roles (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999).

With respect to situational factors, a potentially important situational factor that has been associated with the expression of sexually impositional behavior in the laboratory is a man's understanding of the norms governing interpersonal behavior in that situation. Local social norms that condone sexually harassing behavior, portray women as sexual objects, or reflect misogynist messages have been associated with sexually impositional behavior in laboratory analogue studies. For example, men exposed to misogynist rap music were more likely to show a sexually violent video clip to a female confederate than men who had been exposed to nonmisogynist rap music (Barongan & Hall, 1995). Pryor and colleagues (1993) found that men with a proclivity to engage in quid pro quo sexual harassment behaved differently toward a female confederate over whom they were placed in a position of power when they were exposed to different role models. Exposure to a role model who touched and leered at the female confederate resulted in more touching and sexual behavior toward the female confederate than exposure to a role model that behaved in a professional manner toward the confederate. Therefore, it may be that exposure to an environment that portrays women as sex objects and promotes sexist attitudes is associated with the expression of peer sexual harassment.

Hypotheses

The present study examined the above person and situational factors associated with peer sexual harassment within the context of developing a face valid sexual joke telling laboratory paradigm of peer sexual harassment. We hypothesized that higher scores on measures of adversarial sexual beliefs and sexism would be associated with telling a greater number of sexually offensive jokes; and lower scores on measures of perspective taking and self-monitoring would be associated with telling a greater number of sexually offensive jokes. The lone situational factor under study was the physical environment of laboratory. We hypothesized that exposure to a sexist laboratory environment would be associated with telling a greater number of sexually offensive jokes than exposure to a neutral laboratory environment. Finally, we hypothesized that there would be significant interactions between the person variables and situational variable such that more sexually offensive joke telling would be expected when both person factors and laboratory environment were conducive to the behavior. Thus, participants exposed to the sexist laboratory would be expected to tell more sexually offensive jokes than participants in the neutral condition as their levels of adversarial sexual beliefs or sexist attitudes increased, or levels of perspective-taking ability or self-monitoring decreased.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred twenty-six men from a large midwestern university participated in the study as one of several options for research credit. Data from two participants were excluded because the participants chose to tell fewer than the required five jokes to the confederate. Data from a third participant were excluded because he misunderstood the directions, and data from a fourth participant were excluded because he chose not to tell any jokes to the confederate. Only data from the remaining 122 participants were used

for analysis. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37 (M = 19.93, SD = 2.90) years. The self-identified ethnic breakdown of the sample was 88% Caucasian, 9% African American, 1% Latin American, and 2% mixed ethnic background.

Joke Stimulus

The primary stimulus was a joke list/questionnaire containing 15 jokes with a short series of questions after each joke. The joke list was created from pilot studies in which participants evaluated 29 jokes from commercially available sources. The 29 jokes had been selected for pilot research because they had been judged by the experimenter to be roughly equally humorous, and fall into the category of clean jokes, sexually offensive jokes, or gross jokes. During pilot studies, 120 undergraduate participants rated each joke's humorousness on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not funny* (1) to *really funny* (4) and categorized each joke as either clean, gross, sexually offensive, or other/none of the above. Only jokes that received a mean humor rating of 2 or higher, and had an 80% or higher level of agreement on their category membership were retained for the final stimulus.

Measures

Joke list/questionnaire. The final joke list/questionnaire used in the study contained five gross jokes, five clean jokes, and five sexually offensive jokes that had been rated as equally humorous by pilot study participants. There were two questions after each joke. The first question asked participants to rate the joke's humorousness on a 4-point Likert-type scale and the second asked them to assess the importance of several factors in successfully telling the joke (e.g., comedic timing, voice inflection). The questions were intended to focus participants' attention to the material and to promote the appearance of the study as one of "sense of humor" and "joke telling" rather than peer sexual harassment. An example of a sexually offensive joke from the list is: "What is the smartest thing to come out of a woman's mouth? Einstein's dick." An example of a gross joke from the list is: "What is the difference between boogers and broccoli? Kids don't eat broccoli." An example of a clean joke from the list is: "What's the definition of an economic advisor? Someone who wanted to go into accounting, but didn't have the personality."

Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale. The Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale is a 9-item Likert-type measure assessing combative views of male–female relationships (Burt, 1980). Responses to the items range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). An example of an item is: "In a dating relationship a woman is largely out to take advantage of a man." Higher scores on the scale have been correlated with severe forms of sexually aggressive behavior and proclivities to engage in quid pro quo sexual harassment (Pryor, 1987; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984).

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale is a 33-item true/false measure that assesses an individual's tendency to present themselves in a socially desirable manner (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). The scale was included in the study to control for the effects of participants' tendencies to distort their self-presentation by presenting themselves in a positive light. An example of an item is: "No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener." Higher scores on the scale indicate greater socially desirable responding (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

Modern Sexism Scale. The Modern Sexism Scale is an 8-item Likert-type measure that assesses sexist attitudes (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Responses to the items range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). An example of an item is: "Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States." Individuals with higher scores on the scale have been found to perceive greater inequality between the sexes than actually exists, and to be less sensitive to victims of sexual harassment (Swim et al., 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997).

Perspective Taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Inventory. The Perspective Taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Inventory (Davis, 1983; 1996) is a 7-item Likert-type measure assessing an individual's tendency to adopt the point of view of others. Responses to the items range from 0 (*does not describe me very well*) to 4 (*describes me very well*). An example of an item is: "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other guy's point of view." Lower scores on the subscale have been associated with proclivities to engage in quid pro quo forms of sexual harassment (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987).

Self-Monitoring Scale. The Self-Monitoring Scale is an 18-item true/false measure assessing an individual's self-monitoring propensities (Snyder, 1974; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). An example of an item is: "I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations." High scores on the scale are associated with greater sensitivity to social and interpersonal cues and greater situationally appropriate behavior (Snyder, 1974; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986).

Procedure

Participants completed the procedure individually. Upon their arrival at the laboratory, they were randomly assigned to the sexist or neutral condition. Of the 122 participants whose data were used for analysis, 62 were exposed to the neutral condition and 60 were exposed to the sexist condition.

Participants were greeted by a male experimenter and informed that the project was examining sense of humor, joke-telling ability, and personality. They were informed that

their participation would involve evaluating a brief videotape of a stand-up comedian, evaluating a set of written jokes, telling jokes to a one-person audience, and completing a variety of "personality" questionnaires. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and still receive credit for participation.

The experimenter escorted participants into a laboratory decorated to appear like an office. A poster of the Three Stooges and a sign reading "Humor Project" covered the door to the laboratory. Two different male graduate students alternately served as experimenters for the study. An undergraduate female confederate was seated in one corner of the laboratory. Participants were briefly introduced to the female confederate and informed that she would serve as the audience for the joke-telling portion of the study. Two different undergraduates alternately served as confederates. The confederates were recruited for the project based on their maturity and responsibility. They were informally assessed as being comparably attractive. They were trained with mock participants prior to commencing the project and coached on their roles during the study.

Participants were seated in an opposite corner of the room and informed they would evaluate a stand-up comedian during the first part of the study. Their attention was directed to a TV/VCR and they were given a "stand-up questionnaire" asking them to rate the humor of the comedian's material on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not funny*) to 5 (*very funny*) and to evaluate factors related to the comedian's style of delivery.

For participants assigned to the sexist condition, the laboratory was decorated with movie posters from comedic films and sexually provocative posters depicting women as sex objects. In addition, the stand-up comedian's material referred to women as sex objects and dealt with sexist subject matter. In the neutral condition, the laboratory decorations did not include any sexually provocative posters and participants watched the same stand-up comedian perform material that did not address sexual or gender related topics. The purpose of the stand-up questionnaire was to assess for potential differences in the humorousness of the sexist and neutral video clips, focus participant's attention on the material, and promote the appearance of the study as a humor project. Both clips were about 1.5 minutes in length and obtained from the stand-up concert film *Eddie Murphy Raw*. The clips had been rated as being equally humorous in pilot work.

After watching the video clip and completing the questionnaire, participants were presented with the joke list/questionnaire. In line with the purpose of the study as a humor project, they were asked to read each joke, complete the questions following each joke, select five jokes to tell the confederate, and begin the joke telling when they were ready. Telling five jokes gave participants the opportunity to only tell jokes from a single category (e.g., sexually offensive, clean, and gross) if they were uncomfortable telling other kinds of jokes. The confederate had been instructed to remain attentive but neutral in expression during the joke telling. The confederate did not laugh at any of the jokes so that participants did not receive cues from her as to which jokes to tell.

Following the joke-telling portion of the study, participants were escorted to a separate room to complete the personality questionnaires. Participants completed untitled copies of the Social Desirability Scale, the Self-Monitoring Scale, the Interpersonal Reactivity Inventory, the Modern Sexism Scale, and the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale in that order. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and instructed to take their time in completing the questionnaires. After participants completed the questionnaires, they received a copy of a debriefing statement containing an educational statement regarding offensive joke telling outside the laboratory and encouraging them to attend a more comprehensive debriefing session at the end of the semester.

RESULTS

Reactions to the Sexist and Neutral Video Stimuli

Participants in both the sexist and neutral conditions found their respective video clips of the stand-up comediam to be humorous. The mean humor ratings for the video clips in the neutral and sexist conditions were 3.8 ($SD = 0.9$) and 4.0 ($SD = 0.7$), respectively. The mean difference between the two groups was not significant, $t(122) = -1.68$, $p = .1$.

Reactions to the Joke Stimuli

Participants' humor ratings for the jokes were summed by category (i.e., clean, gross, and sexually offensive) and then averaged. Each joke category's overall humor score could theoretically range from 4 (indicating that every participant gave every joke in the category the lowest possible rating) to 20 (indicating that every participant gave every joke in the category the highest possible rating). The clean joke category had a mean of 9.4 ($SD = 2.2$), the gross joke category had a mean of 9.9 ($SD = 2.2$), and the sexually offensive joke category had a mean of 11.9 ($SD = 2.7$). Differences between these mean scores were compared using t tests. Alpha was set at .017 (.05/3) for each comparison to maintain the family-wise error rate at .05. The sexually offensive joke category received a higher mean humor score than the gross joke category, $t(120) = -8.43$, $p < .001$, and the clean joke category, $t(118) = -9.44$, $p < .001$. However, the mean humor scores for all three categories were in the midrange of possible scores. The mean difference between the gross joke category and clean joke category was not significant, $t(119) = -2.39$. $p = .18$.

We also conducted t tests to examine differences in the joke category humor scores between participants who told one or more sexually offensive jokes and participants who did not tell any sexually offensive jokes. Alpha was set at .017 (.05/3) for each comparison to maintain the family-wise

error rate at .05. Differences between sexually offensive and non-sexually offensive joke tellers emerged on the sexually offensive joke category. Sexually offensive joke tellers had a higher mean humor score for the sexually offensive joke category ($M = 12.4$, $SD = 2.6$) than did non-sexually offensive joke tellers ($M = 9.2$, $SD = 2.2$; $t[119] = 4.38$, $p < .001$). There were no differences between sexually offensive and non-sexually offensive joke tellers in their mean scores for the clean joke category, $t(118) = -1.64$, $p = .1$, or gross joke category, $t(120) = -0.48$, $p = .63$.

Descriptive Information About Joke Telling

Joke telling by participants was highly varied. Ninety-one percent of participants told one or more gross jokes, 90% told one or more clean jokes, and 80% told one or more sexually offensive jokes. Of the combined 610 jokes told by participants, 35% were from the clean category, 33% were from the sexually offensive category, and 32% were from the gross category. Analyses of variance indicated that clean, gross, and sexually offensive joke telling did not differ significantly by participant exposure to a particular experimenter or confederate, $F(1, 122) = 0.24$ to 1.45, *ns*.

Sexually offensive joke telling among participants was highly varied, with some participants choosing to tell no sexually offensive jokes over the course of their five joke-telling trials and some participants telling the maximum of five sexually offensive jokes. Among participants who told one or more sexually offensive jokes, 27% told one joke, 46% told two, 22% told three, 3% told four, and 2% told five. Seventy-seven percent of participants exposed to the neutral condition told one or more sexually offensive jokes, and 83% of participants exposed to the sexist condition told one or more sexually offensive jokes, which was not a statistically significant difference, $F(1, 122) = 1.10$, $p = .3$.

Descriptive Information About Primary Measures

Means, standard deviations, internal consistency coefficients, and a correlation matrix for the independent variables and dependent variable are presented in Table 1. Examination of the correlation matrix revealed social desirability was negatively correlated with self-monitoring and adversarial sexual beliefs, and positively correlated with perspective taking. Self-monitoring was negatively correlated with sexism. Adversarial sexual beliefs was negatively correlated with perspective taking and positively correlated with number of sexually offensive jokes told.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine associations between sexually offensive joke telling and the independent variables. The regression revealed a curvilinear rather than a linear relationship between self-monitoring and joke telling. Thus, the regression was reorganized to include linear and quadratic terms for self-monitoring using an approach recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). The Social Desirability Scale was entered on the first step to control for the potential tendency of participants to bias their responses in a socially desirable manner. The person variables and the situational variable were entered on the second step. The squared scores for the Self-Monitoring Scale were entered on the third step. Interactions between the person variables and the laboratory environment were entered on the fourth step. The quadratic term for the interaction between self-monitoring and laboratory environment was entered on the fifth step.

A summary of the regression is presented in Table 2. Examination of the tolerance values did not suggest the presence of significant multicollinearity. After controlling for the variance contributed by social desirability, scores on the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale were associated with sexually offensive joke telling. The direction of the effect indicates that greater adversarial sexual beliefs were associated with more sexually offensive joke telling. Scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale were associated with sexually offensive joke telling, but this effect was curvilinear rather than linear. Plotting the effect revealed a U-shaped relationship in which more sexually offensive joke telling was associated

Table 1

Correlations Among Variables of Interest

Variable	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
1. Social Desirability Scale	–					
2. Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale	−.29**	–				
3. Modern Sexism Scale	.06	.13	–			
4. Perspective-Taking subscale	.41**	−.18*	−.17	–		
5. Self-Monitoring Scale	−.33**	.06	−.36**	.07	–	
6. Number of sexually offensive jokes told	−.05	.22*	.10	−.03	.04	–
M	14.52	31.60	2.68	16.55	11.05	1.67
SD	5.31	8.02	.63	4.78	3.21	1.15
α	.79	.72	.80	.79	.64	–

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Sexually Offensive Joke Telling ($N = 122$)

Variable	*Order of Entry*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
Social Desirability Scale	1	−.01	.02	−.05
Laboratory Environment	2	.29	.22	.13
Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale	2	.03	.01	.22*
Modern Sexism Scale	2	.20	.19	.11
Perspective-Taking subscale	2	.06	.03	.02
Self-Monitoring Scale	2	.03	.04	.08
Curvilinear Self-Monitoring	3	.02	.01	1.13*
Adversarial Sexual Beliefs × Laboratory Environment	4	.03	.03	.43
Modern Sexism × Laboratory Environment	4	−1.13	.38	−1.38**
Perspective Taking × Laboratory Environment	4	.02	.05	.15
Self-Monitoring × Laboratory Environment	4	−.12	.08	−.61
Curvilinear Self-Monitoring × Laboratory Environment	5	−.04	.02	−.33

Note. $R^2 = .003$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for Step 3*; $\Delta R^2 = .08$ for Step 4*; $\Delta R^2 = .00$ for Step 5.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

with both lower and higher self-monitoring scores, while fewer jokes were told as scores fell toward the middle of the distribution. None of the other hypothesized person factors were significantly associated with sexually offensive joke telling. The lone situational factor, laboratory environment, was associated with sexually offensive joke telling only in interaction with sexism.

Interaction effects were coded, analyzed, and interpreted using the recommendations of Predhazur (1982). There was a significant interaction between scores on the Modern Sexism Scale and laboratory environment. In the neutral condition, sexually offensive joke telling was positively related to sexism such that telling more sexually offensive jokes was associated with increasing levels of sexism, $\beta = .40$, $t(122) = 2.84$, $p = .005$. However, sexually offensive joke telling was inversely related to sexism in the sexist environment such that telling fewer sexually offensive jokes was associated with increasing levels of sexism, $\beta = -1.38$, $t(122) = -3.20$, $p = .002$. This interaction effect is graphically depicted in Figure 1. The other hypothesized interaction effects were not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

There are no previous studies reported in the literature that use a laboratory analogue closely approximating a real-world behavior to study peer sexual harassment. In this study, a joke-telling laboratory analogue was developed to examine person and situational factors that may contribute to peer sexual harassment. Real-world stimuli in the form of sexually offensive jokes were used to examine a typical experience faced by college students.

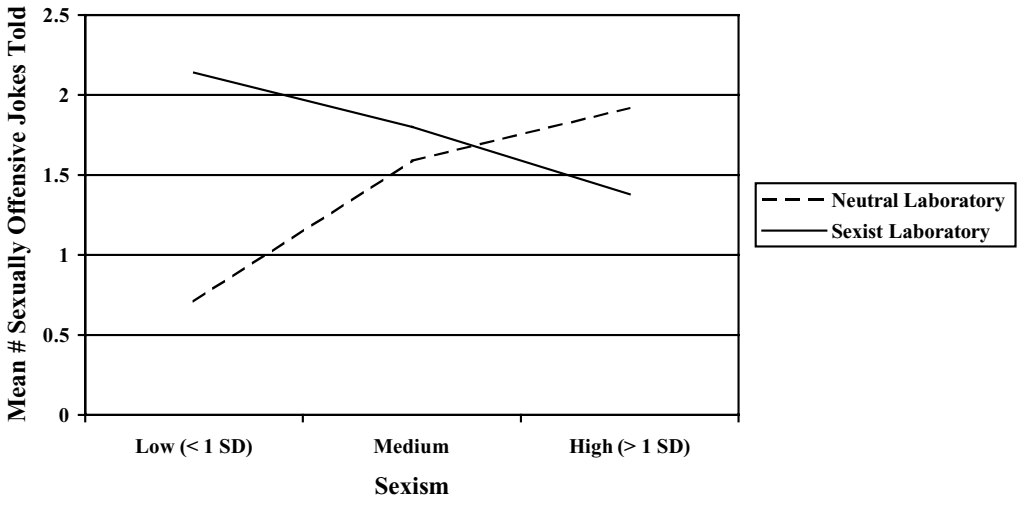

Fig. 1. Diagrammatic presentations of the interaction between laboratory condition and sexist attitudes.

Participant Joke Telling

Perhaps one of the more striking findings in the study is that 80% of the participants chose to tell one or more sexually offensive jokes to the confederate without knowing how she would perceive these jokes. This percentage is high and consistent with survey data on the frequency of milder but serious forms of peer sexual harassment on college campuses (Hughes & Sandler, 1988; Shepela & Levesque, 1998). One possible explanation for the high prevalence of peer sexual harassment on college campuses may lie in differences between women and men regarding inappropriate sexual behavior. Compared to women, men are more likely to perceive sexually offensive jokes, teasing, and comments as harmless, rather than as offensive and inappropriate. If many men do not perceive these behaviors as problematic or harmful, there will not be sufficient internal inhibitions to prevent them from engaging in these behaviors. The high frequency of sexually offensive joke telling in the present study may have been partly due to these types of attitudes by men.

Factors Associated With Sexually Offensive Joke Telling

The joke-telling paradigm was used to examine potential person variables and a potential situational variable associated with peer sexual harassment. With respect to person variables, high scores on the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale were associated with more sexually offensive joke telling. This finding is consistent with our hypotheses and consistent with prior research, which has found this variable to be associated with high scores on the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale (Pryor, 1987) and a history of sexually aggressive behavior (Malamuth, 1986; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). The finding suggests that this variable may also be related to the expression of peer sexual harassment.

The relationship between adversarial sexual beliefs and the expression of peer sexual harassment may lie in the perpetrator's desire for power and domination over the victim. For example, a man who perceives relationships with women as an adversarial process may make demeaning and humiliating comments toward a woman as a means of psychologically gaining an upper hand and asserting his dominance over her. This hypothesis is supported by research indicating that men with a history of sexual aggression engaged in more domineering behavior in conversations with female than male confederates (Malamuth & Thornhill, 1994). The fact that scores on the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale have now been found to be associated with sexually offensive joke telling, proclivities to engage in quid pro quo sexual harassment, and sexually assaultive behavior, suggests that this variable may be a common thread among perpetrators of peer sexual harassment, quid pro quo sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Research by Malamuth and colleagues has indicated that this variable is part of a larger composite variable labeled "Hostile Masculinity" that is characteristic of men who aggress sexually and/or nonsexually against women (Malamuth, Sackloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Malamuth & Thornhill, 1994).

Scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale were related to sexually offensive joke telling in a curvilinear manner. High and low self-monitoring was associated with telling more sexually offensive jokes, and moderate self-monitoring was associated with telling fewer sexually offensive jokes. We had hypothesized that joke telling would increase as a function of self-monitoring, with more sexually offensive joke telling occurring as self-monitoring skills decreased. Thus, the curvilinear relationship in the data is puzzling. One possible explanation is that low and high self-monitors told more jokes than moderate self-monitors due to different factors. Low self-monitors may have told more jokes due to a general reduced awareness of appropriate situational behavior (as hypothesized), whereas high self-monitors may have told more jokes due to an inference from the presence of sexually offensive jokes on the joke list that such behavior was situationally appropriate.

Exposure to a sexist laboratory environment was significantly associated with sexually offensive joke telling in interaction with the sexist condition. In the neutral environment, more sexually offensive joke telling was associated with increasing levels of sexism as we had hypothesized. However, in the sexist environment less sexually offensive joke telling was associated with increasing levels of sexism. One possible explanation for this finding may have to do with the nature of the construct measured by the Modern Sexism Scale. The scale was designed to assess subtle and covert forms of sexism rather than overt forms of sexism. In the present study, the neutral condition may have provided participants high in covert sexism with an environment in which they could comfortably engage in sexually offensive joke telling without the appearance of deliberately engaging in sexist behavior. In contrast, the sexist condition confronted participants high in covert sexism with an overtly sexist environment and they may have perceived that engaging in sexually offensive joke telling in such an environment would be akin to overtly condoning sexist behavior. The effect may have inhibited sexually offensive joke telling in the sexist condition and disinhibited sexually offensive joke telling in the neutral condition in participants higher in covert sexism.

Improvements, Limitations, and Future Directions

One limitation of the findings is that participants found the sexually offensive jokes to be funnier than the clean or gross jokes. Ideally it would have been best if all three types of jokes had been perceived as equally humorous by the participants. This limitation raises the possibility that the high rate of sexually offensive joke telling was due to a preference for this kind of humor. However, more jokes were told to the confederate from the clean joke category than any other joke category, and jokes from the gross and clean joke categories composed 67% of the total number

of jokes delivered during the study. Thus, the joke telling choices exhibited by participants suggest that they based their choice of jokes on factors other than humor.

The present study improved upon prior laboratory analogues of sexual imposition by studying a behavior that is highly prevalent in the college student participant population. This may give the results a degree of generalizability among college students that is lost on other analogues that examine unwanted sexual behaviors in college student populations. For example, studying factors in quid pro quo sexual harassment among a college population is complicated by the fact that few college students are in a supervisory position in a workplace. The drawback to the strategy utilized in the present study is that the results may not generalize to older adults or to instances of peer sexual harassment between workplace colleagues. In addition, the results may not generalize to non-White populations. Given the high prevalence of these behaviors among college students, it is likely that any conclusions regarding noncollege populations would be overstated, since the data likely serve as an overestimate.

One avenue for future research with the joke-telling paradigm is the study of peer influences on sexually harassing behavior. The social context within which many instances of peer sexual harassment occur (e.g., parties, classrooms, and bars) suggest that a peer's behavior may play an important role in a given person's expression of sexually harassing behavior. Another avenue for future research with the paradigm is the impact of an environment with a feminist perspective on sexual harassment because this may have an inhibitory effect on sexual harassment. Laboratory research geared toward the exploration of inhibitory factors may be of help in discovering unique person and situational factors that contribute to fewer incidents of peer sexual harassment. Research on peer sexual harassment that utilizes existing measures of quid pro quo sexual harassment, such as the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale, would clarify similarities and differences between men who engage in one form of sexual harassment, but refrain from another.

In conclusion, the present study represents a first step toward the development of a laboratory analogue for studying peer sexual harassment, and person and situational factors associated with peer sexual harassment. Further validation and research using the joke-telling paradigm may be of assistance in examining other important person and situational factors associated with peer sexual harassment. The discovery of factors associated with sexual harassment may one day help to inhibit the expression of peer sexual harassment, even in individuals and in situations that are otherwise conducive to the expression of this social problem.

Initial submission: January 2, 2003
Initial acceptance: October 20, 2003
Final acceptance: January 6, 2004

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