Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2020), **13**, 208–212
doi:10.1017/iop.2020.38

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

COMMENTARY

Who else besides (White) women? The need for representation in harassment training

Gabrielle C. Danna, Joel Hernandez, Bhindai Mahabir*, Dhanisha Nandigama, and Ho Kwan Cheung

University at Albany, State University of New York
*Corresponding author. Email: kmahabir@albany.edu

Hayes et al. (2020) raised the million-dollar question in the midst of the #metoo movement: Why has antidiscrimination/harassment training to date been mostly ineffective? They contended that this is likely a reflection of misalignment among training content, goals, and effectiveness criteria. They proposed adopting novel perspectives beyond traditional applied psychology theories to refocus both research and practical efforts to tackle this all-important issue. Although we commend the vast array of perspectives and associated research questions raised by the authors, one factor that also merits consideration is the degree to which existing antidiscrimination/harassment training representatively and accurately reflects the daily occurrences in the workplace. Specifically, we believe that current sexual harassment (SH) training often portrays these issues to be gender specific (i.e., heterosexual men harassing heterosexual women), and such misrepresentation is likely to impact trainees' attitudes and training transfer negatively. In this commentary, we draw from intersectional research on SH and the training literature to argue that current training should represent a more extensive set of minorities whose intersecting stigmatized identities make them especially vulnerable to SH. Furthermore, although we acknowledge that SH is a specific manifestation of discrimination, we are focusing our discussion on SH because this is often a separate category of training in both research literature and organizational settings while operating under some of the similar mechanisms as discrimination.

Sexual harassment—who else besides (White) women?

The typical portrayal of SH tends to be heterosexual (and often White) women being harassed by heterosexual men; hence, SH is primarily viewed as a women-specific and sexual-desire–driven problem. Indeed, women make up a considerable portion of harassment victims, and they also tend to report more cases of SH than men do (Quick & McFadyen, 2017). According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, in 2011, 83.7% of the sexual harassment claims were made by women (EEOC, n.d.). Additionally, survey work examining firefighters found 84.7% of women were treated differently because of their sex, and 30.2% of women experienced sexual advances in the workplace (Hulett et al., 2008). However, this is an oversimplification of the reality of the issue: Women are not the only gender being harassed. The intersection of one's gender with other stigmatized social identities (e.g., race, sexual orientation) can further exacerbate the degree to which he or she is harassed. Sex-based harassment (SBH), as proposed by Berdahl (2007), is a more accurate, inclusive portrayal of the issue. Traditional SH tends to frame

The first four authors contributed equally to this article.

© Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc. 2020.

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.38 Published online by Cambridge University Press

harassment as prompted by sexual desire; however, SBH frames harassment as based on the power to protect one's sex-based status and to withhold a standard of norms and behavior (Berdahl, 2007). SBH broadens the definition to include any behaviors of degradation based on an individual's sex to display power and preserve social status (Berdahl, 2007), which captures an array of potential harassment incidents affecting minority women, LGBT individuals, and men that we will discuss below.

Because people are defined by a multitude of social identities, their experiences can significantly differ if more than one of their identities is stigmatized (Crenshaw, 1991). Notably, minority women may be particularly susceptible to harassment because of the "double jeopardy" posed by their race and gender. Although research on SBH experienced by minority women to date has been scarce, the limited evidence seems to support this notion. Research suggests that Black women experience SBH more often than White women (Buchanan et al., 2009). More so, Black women perceive cross-racial SBH (White man sexually harassing a Black woman) to be more threatening and degrading than intraracial SBH (Black man sexually harassing a Black woman; Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Bergman & Drasgow, 2003; Cortina et al., 1998; Kalof et al., 2001). Collectively, this body of evidence suggests that not all women experience SBH equally.

Another marginalized group that is particularly vulnerable to workplace SBH is the LGBT community. Although rarely studied, a few studies have found supporting evidence that LGBT individuals experience SBH and sexual assault more often than heterosexual individuals do, yet they are not reported as often because of intrinsic stigma associated with their sexual orientation/gender identity (Quick & McFadyen, 2017; Smith et al., 2016). LGBT individuals often experience SBH early in their lives, starting at grade school and continuing into adulthood as they enter the workforce (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). Besides suffering from stereotyping and gender discrimination in mainstream society, nonheterosexual employees endure SBH and other types of mistreatment even in "gay-friendly" workplaces (Giuffre et al., 2008). In addition to the fear of retaliation and stigma associated with harassment that heterosexual people experience, LGBT employees must be concerned with disclosure and discrimination specific to their sexual orientation/gender identity, which often leads to detrimental effects on their mental health, workplace productivity, and job satisfaction (Sears & Mallory, 2011).

Finally, even though the stereotypical portrayal of SBH puts heterosexual men in the harasser position, statistics and research indicate that they can be victims of harassment as well. A national study on sexual harassment and assault found that 43% of men have experienced some form of sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime ("Measuring #MeToo", 2019), and such abuse is beyond the "good-natured horseplay" often used to justify same-sex harassment among men (Alonso, 2018). Because SBH is a means to display power and dominance, harassment incidents against men are usually attempts to reinforce standards of masculinity and exert power (Berdahl, 2007). Despite its prevalence and equally detrimental effects, SBH against men continues to be trivialized (Gutek, 1985) for several reasons. First, behaviors identified as harassing are generally perceived differently by men compared to women (Berdahl et al., 1996). With greater emphasis on traditional masculinity and testing of one's ability to endure hazing rituals in many male-dominated organizations (Brodsky, 1976; Collinson, 1988), it is unorthodox for a man to report SH. Mainstream society often emphasizes heterosexual hypermasculinity and shuns male same-sex SBH (Stockdale et al., 1999). Accordingly, men experiencing same-sex SBH suffer more severe consequences than men harassed by women (DuBois et al., 1998) because reporting cases of same-sex SH is more likely to be seen as embarrassing as a result of deviating from stereotypical manly behaviors. Altogether, contrary to the popular notion of harassment, the provided evidence suggests that SBH affects more than just heterosexual, White women. Next, we will examine the degree to which existing SBH training reflects these nuances of the issues.

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.38 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Are organizations adapting with the time?

Given the complexity of organizational harassment issues and the need for greater inclusivity, are organizations adapting their training programs to keep up? Based on Tippett's (2018) overview of SH training programs in organizations from 1980 to 2016, it appears training has mostly remained unchanged over time, with only minor changes such as adding new legal terminology where needed. According to Tippett, a typical SH training video includes an authority figure giving a summary of the legal rules and offering advice on how to report cases of SBH, with an emphasis on legal compliance rather than the nature and impact of SBH. One reason that organizations have yet to update their SH training is because they prefer basic training that is easily recognizable to their employees (Tippett, 2018). Companies are not incentivized to change their training because SH training is provided to employees to protect employers from legal disputes (Tinkler, 2012).

According to a recent interdisciplinary review on SH training, SH training is reported to be legally effective if it (a) meets minimum legal requirements for organization-provided SH training, (b) reduces external SH legal claims filed against the company, (c) increases the organization's ability to defeat a claim successfully, and (d) reduces what the company is required to pay if the claim is successful (Roehling & Huang, 2018). Given this information, it makes sense why organizations are incentivized to do the legal minimum and implement only basic training. Consequently, external vendors are left demotivated to provide updated material, knowing that companies prefer conventional modules. These two factors play a part in explaining the stagnation in the innovation of SH training.

Looking at SBH merely as a legal issue is an excessively narrow view. SBH is an ethical issue that concerns social-sexual behavior at work (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999), meaning its occurrence (or lack thereof) depends heavily on a shared sense of moral norms by the organization. Perhaps even more so than other types of task-based training, SBH training content needs to accurately reflect the social reality of the issue beyond the vague legal definitions in order to gauge the attention of the trainees (i.e., regular employees). For example, California has recently adjusted its laws for government-mandated SBH training to address harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, while also providing practical examples of these types of harassment ("California Department of Fair Employment and Housing," n.d.). We endorse this policy as it is a sensible way to address the problem of diversity noninvasively. SBH training content should be updated to include more minority representation to reflect the different manifestations of SBH. Next, we will draw from training literature to explain how increasing the representation of SBH training can facilitate training outcomes, given that SH training can improve worker's behavior (Monroe et al., 2014).

How does representation in harassment training content improve training outcomes?

Obtaining a sustained positive change after delivering SH training is significantly more difficult than procedural or skill-based training. SH training addresses skills (i.e., open skills) that are not directly related to the job role and sometimes elicit emotional responses, whereas procedural or skill-based training addresses skills (i.e., closed skills) and procedures directly related to the job. These unique characteristics of SH awareness training make the limitations in transfer of training, discussed in the following paragraphs, even more salient. We argue that having representative SBH content is crucial to training success to keep trainees engaged during training, to approach both new and old SBH training positively, and to promote the transfer of training.

First, to maximize the transfer of SBH training, the content presented during training must be representative of and applicable to the real workplace. One reaction to training, reaction to content validity, refers to the degree to which trainees (i.e., regular employees) believe that material delivered during training is representative of the actual job context (Bates, 1997). Trainees need to

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.38 Published online by Cambridge University Press

engage with realistic content during training for the training experience to have useful and positive implications once they return to work. Upon post-training, trainees should be able to draw upon their training experience to perform and utilize newly learned skills and behaviors. If there is no need to retrieve information presented during training, then trainees may have adverse reactions to training and not perceive the experience as useful. Content validity is positively related to performance utility. In other words, the degree to which training material is viewed as representative or not is related to how much trainees think their training experience facilitates workplace performance (Bates, 1997). If SBH materials presented during training are not perceived as realistic interpersonal interactions that employees may experience, then perceptions of content validity are threatened. The likeliness of positive changes in behaviors or attitudes would in turn radically diminish. Consistent with our argument of organizations being more mindful of the content presented during training, McKillip (2001) suggests that high content validity of training is contingent upon crucial components being implemented in training while keeping the training material free of any trivial components. To achieve this, organizations should approach training needs more diligently. Training designers should clearly articulate the spectrum of inappropriate behaviors and attitudes present on the job in order to devise a successful design and delivery of training.

Aside from attitudes toward the content delivered in training, attitudes toward SBH training, in general, are essential factors that must be accepted positively. Specifically, organizations must consider that an employee's first experience with SBH training is a moment in which critical perceptions are formed that have downstream motivational consequences for future training. If trainees do not perceive an initial training course to be useful, then they will experience declined motivation during the following training experiences (Sitzmann et al., 2009) . A poorly designed SBH training with content that is outdated, not analogous to real-world manifestations of SBH, or fails to represent different populations equally may negatively impact perceptions and attitudes toward other future SBH training. Even if trainees experience a thoroughly designed and well delivered SBH training in the future, the potential for a successful transfer of training is diminished before training begins due to attitudes formed during prior negative SBH training experiences. Additionally, when organizations incorporate representative content into the training experience, this may signal to their employees that the organization values the psychological safety of all individuals within the organization.

Conclusion

Extending ideas proposed by Hayes et al. (2020), we argued that the current lack of success in harassment training could be partially attributed to the discrepancy between the training content and real-world manifestations of harassment behaviors. Beyond the typical heterosexual man harassing White woman scenario portrayed in most organizational training, SBH affects different minority groups and heterosexual men differently. We contend that in order to maximize training transfer, it is essential that organizations first gain a holistic view of workplace harassment and incorporate that into their training content. Only then can organizations truly leverage value from SBH training and make substantive progress with the existing workplace harassment problem.

References

Alonso, N. (2018). Playing to win: Male–male sex-based harassment and the masculinity contest. *Journal of Social Issues*, **74**(3), 477–499.

Bates, R. A. (1997). The impact of training content validity, organizational commitment, learning, performance utility, and transfer climate on transfer of training in an industrial setting. *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*, 6382.

Berdahl, J. L. (2007). Harassment based on sex: Protecting social status in the context of gender hierarchy. *Academy of Management Review*, **32**(2), 641–658.

Berdahl, J. L., Magley, V. J., & Waldo, C. R. (1996). The sexual harassment of men? Exploring the concept with theory and data. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, **20**(4), 527–547.

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.38 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Berdahl, J. L., & Moore, C. (2006). Workplace harassment: Double jeopardy for minority women. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **91**(2), 426–436.

Bergman, M. E., & Drasgow, F. (2003). Race as a moderator in a model of sexual harassment: An empirical test. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, **8**(2), 131–145.

Bowes-Sperry, L., & Powell, G. N. (1999). Observers' reactions to social-sexual behavior at work: An ethical decision making perspective. *Journal of Management*, **25**(6), 779–802.

Brodsky, C. M. (1976). *The harassed worker*. Toronto, ON: Lexington Books, DC Heath and Company.

Buchanan, N. T., Bergman, M. E., Bruce, T. A., Woods, K. C., & Lichty, L. L. (2009). Unique and joint effects of sexual and racial harassment on college students' well-being. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, **31**(3), 267–285.

California Department of Fair Employment & Housing. (n.d.). *Sexual harassment FAQs*. Retrieved from https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/Employment/?content=faq/sexual-harassment-faqs/#faqS

Collinson, D. L. (1988). "Engineering humor": Masculinity, joking and conflict in shopfloor relations. *Organization Studies*, **9**, 181–199.

Cortina, L. M., Swan, S., Fitzgerald, L. F., & Waldo, C. (1998). Sexual harassment and assault: Chilling the climate for women in academia. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, **22**(3), 419–441.

Crenshaw, K.W. (1991) Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, Identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, **43**(6), 1241–1299.

Dubois, C. L., Knapp, D. E., Faley, R. H., & Kustis, G. A. (1998). An empirical examination of same-and other-gender sexual harassment in the workplace. *Sex Roles*, **39**(9–10), 731–749.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (n.d.). Sexual harassment charges EEOC & FEPAs combined: FY 1997–FY 2011. Retrieved from http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/sexual_harassment.cfm

Giuffre, P., Dellinger, K., & Williams, C. L. (2008). "No retribution for being gay?" Inequality in gay-friendly workplaces. *Sociological Spectrum*, **28**(3), 254–277.

Gutek, B. A. (1985). *Sex and the workplace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hayes, T. L., Kaylor, L. E., & Oltman, K. A. (2020). Coffee and controversy: How applied psychology can revitalize sexual harassment and racial discrimination training. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, **13**(2), 117–136.

Hulett, D. M., Bendick, M., Thomas, S. Y., & Moccio, F. (2008). *A national report card on women in firefighting*. Madison, WI: International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services.

Kalof, L., Eby, K. K., Matheson, J. L., & Kroska, R. J. (2001). The influence of race and gender on student self-reports on sexual harassment by college professors. *Gender & Society*, **15**(2), 282–302.

McFarland, W. P., & Dupuis, M. (2001). The legal duty to protect gay and lesbian students from violence in school. *Professional School Counseling*, **4**(3), 171–179.

McKillip, J. (2001). Case studies in job analysis and training evaluation. *International Journal of Training and Development*, **5**(4), 283–289.

Monroe, K. R., Choi, J., Howell, E., Lampros-Monroe, C., Trejo, C., & Perez, V. (2014). Gender equality in the ivory tower, and how best to achieve it. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, **47**(2), 418–426.

Quick, J. C., & McFadyen, M. (2017). Sexual harassment: Have we made any progress? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, **22**(3), 286–298.

Roehling, M. V., & Huang, J. (2018). Sexual harassment training effectiveness: An interdisciplinary review and call for research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, **39**(2), 134–150.

Sears, B., & Mallory, C. (2011). Documented evidence of employment discrimination & its effects on LGBT people. *UCLA: The Williams Institute*. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/03m1g5sg

Sitzmann, T., Brown, K. G., Ely, K., & Kraiger, K. (2009). Motivation to learn in a military training curriculum: A longitudinal investigation. *Military Psychology*, **21**, 534–551.

Smith, C. P., Cunningham, S. A., & Freyd, J. J. (2016). Sexual violence, institutional betrayal, and psychological outcomes for LGB college students. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, **2**(4), 351–360.

Stockdale, M. S., Visio, M., & Batra, L. (1999). The sexual harassment of men: Evidence for a broader theory of sexual harassment and sex discrimination. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, **5**(3), 630–664.

Tinkler, J. E. (2012). Resisting the enforcement of sexual harassment law. *Law & Social Inquiry*, **37**(1), 1–24.

Tippett, E. C. (2018). Harassment trainings: A content analysis. *Berkeley J. Emp. & Lab. L.*, **39**, 481–526.

Cite this article: Danna, G.C., Hernandez, J., Mahabir, B., Nandigama, D., and Cheung, H.K. (2020). Who else besides (White) women? The need for representation in harassment training. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* **13**, 208–212. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.38

https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2020.38 Published online by Cambridge University Press