

Capital University Student's Perceptions on Sexual Harassment

Research Outline

Introduction

In today's constantly evolving and globalized state, the sexual and gender harassment of women is prevalent at every level of society. From peer – to – peer harassment to gender degradation in the work and academic setting, this is a major social problem that needs to be addressed. This is a vital topic to consider as more women enter the competitive academic world and work force. A comfortable and equal opportunity environment cannot coexist with sexism and gender degradation. Western society is dominated by the male gender, and the perception of sexual harassment varies between different social standings, socioeconomic status and gender. In the United States of America, a woman's right to vote was disputed until as late as 1921; in other countries, such as Kuwait, women were unable to vote until 2005. Women have been, and still are, regarded as sub-man in many places. In Western society alone, men hold positions of power, make household decisions, and are considered more level-headed and reliable. Women are regarded by many as fragile, nurturing and emotional individuals who would fare better in a home setting than a corporate one. Although recent years have accepted women in the workplace as normality, women have often been forced to endure the pressure of working a full-time job while taking care of children. Many of these women have husbands who have chosen to maintain the "traditional male gender role", and still expect their wives to be the primary care source for children. Simultaneously, lawmakers have had to work furiously to draft legislation to protect women from the overwhelming amount of sexual harassment, most of which is unreported, that women have endured

from male co-workers and superiors. Despite the evidence that the number of females in college have climbed enough to surpass males in college, undergraduate females are often subjected to accusations of pursuing a college degree solely for the purpose of finding a husband. When women differentiate or disconnect themselves from the traditional gender role and expectation that society has for women, they are publicly scrutinized and harassed.

“Feminism is a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.” – Pat Robertson

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of my study is to identify the different perceptions of sexual and gender harassment among college students in order to pinpoint the root cause, and eventually the solution, to female sexual and gender harassment. My population for analysis will be the undergraduate population of Capital University.

Research Questions and Research Hypothesis

Research Question: Is there a difference in the perception of sexual harassment between male and female undergraduate students at Capital University?

Hypothesis 1: Male students at Capital University are significantly less likely to classify gender degradation as sexual harassment than female students.

Hypothesis 2: Male students at Capital University are significantly more likely to assume that women are attending college to meet a future male companion than female students.

Hypothesis 3: Male students at Capital University are significantly more likely to have made jokes about a member of the opposite sex than a female.

Hypothesis 4: Male students at Capital University are significantly more likely to have committed a sexual offense against a female. Female students at Capital University are significantly more likely to be a victim than a perpetrator in a sexual assault.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that I am unable to reach a population outside of undergraduate students at Capital University. Due to the abundance and convenience of testing an undergraduate population, there may be some error that must be accounted for. The demographics for this study will be skewed, as the demographics at Capital University include mostly white, mostly female undergraduate students. Furthermore, as I will be testing the perceptions that individuals have of sexual harassment through the use

of a survey questionnaire or vignette, I realize that it is impossible to truly gauge accurate perceptions and reactions. This is due to the inability to recreate sexual harassment situations in real-life setting. It should be noted that previous researchers (Stolte 1994) (Saunders & Senn, 2009) have referenced the competence of these methods for the purpose of gathering information.

Definition of Terms

Gender Harassment refers to behaviors that are not necessarily considered explicitly sexual in nature, but rather hostile and degrading attitudes toward women. This may include jokes, comments, or a negative attitude toward women based solely on gender.

Coercion refers to bribing or threatening a female for a sexual favors.

Sexual Harassment refers to sexual advances and/or unwanted sexual attention made by heterosexual males toward heterosexual females. This study does not include sexual or gender harassment between homosexual men or homosexual women.

Perception refers to the interpretation that a student has to a specific situation or behavior.

Literature review

In a beginner's research study, it is an absolute necessity to have many references to support any hypothesis, result, and conclusion that I may find throughout my data collection and analysis. For this reason, I have compiled ten scholarly, peer-reviewed articles that are relevant to my study.

To begin, I will define sexual harassment as it will be used in this study:

“The structure of sexual harassment is often broken into three related sets of verbal and nonverbal behaviors: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995). Gender harassment—also referred to as gender discrimination by (Nora et al. 2002)—includes a range of behaviors “generally not aimed at sexual co-operation” that suggest “insulting, hostile, and degrading attitudes about women” (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995, p. 168); such behaviors also include ignoring or excluding women (Yount, 1991) or other related behaviors indicating that female students are less worthy of their faculty's attention than male students. Unwanted sexual attention includes repetitive requests for dates, persistent messages or phone calls, and unwanted physical contact; it is different from sexual coercion because no job- or grade-related losses or advantages are attached. Such unwanted attention is an indicator of a “hostile environment,” a frequently used term in the literature that is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, along with sexual coercion, which is the third type of sexual harassment. This third type, also referred to as *quid pro quo*, refers to threats that tie sexual cooperation to some job- or grade-related benefit” (Wear, Aultman, & Borges, 2007).

This definition is sufficient to cover all constraints of the research I will be exploring. As my sample population is undergraduate students, it is important to gain as much background information as possible. This chapter will be spent reviewing and discussing previous research studies that have been done regarding gender, sexual harassment, and perceptions of college students regarding these issues.

Research Methods

As my research topic is highly sensitive, the age of participants in a sample or population would be required to be over the age of 18. Adult consent would be required to participate, and participants would be alerted of the sensitive nature of the issue. Participation would be optional and anonymous. However, since the population of “undergraduate students” is so large, a smaller sample would have to be obtained for cost, time, and efficiency purposes.

Eliminating Bias

In order to eliminate as much bias as possible, data would have to be obtained from several universities. This would be particularly meaningful if the data came from multiple states, but for cost and accessibility purposes, one state (Ohio) would be the best option for this study. Some bias can and would be systematically accounted for, such as race, gender and religion.

Methods

My methods for obtaining the data would be in the form of a survey. The survey would have to be thoroughly peer reviewed and carefully worded due to the sensitive nature of the subject. This is done in order to prevent participants from suffering any

personal or mental damages that could be sparked by certain questions. Because these questions will be asked and answered qualitatively, a Chi square test is required to compute the data. Undergraduate students from different universities in Ohio would be randomly selected based upon student ID numbers. An even number of freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors would be preferable in order to get an adequate response from all areas of undergraduate students.

Results

Due to time constraints, and the sensitivity of the topic, a sample was not available to test.

References

- Angelone, D. J., Mitchell, D., & Carola, K. (2008). Tolerance of sexual harassment: a laboratory paradigm.
- Wear, D., Aultman, J. M., & Borges, N. J. (2007). Retheorizing sexual harassment in medical education: women students' perceptions at five u.s medical schools.
- Saunders, K. A., & Senn, C. Y. (2009). Should i confront him? men's reactions to hypothetical confrontations of peer sexual harassment.
- Osman, S. L. (2006). The continuation of perpetrator behaviors that influence perceptions of sexual harassment.
- Paludi, M., Nydegger, R., Desouza, E., Nydegger, L., & Dicker, K. A. (2006). International perspectives on sexual harassment of college students: the sounds of silence.
- Sahl, D., & Keene, J. R. (2010). The sexual double standard and gender differences in predictors of perceptions of adult-teen sexual relationships.
- Melander, L. A. (2010). College students' perceptions of intimate partner cyber harassment.
- Kerodal, A. G., & Bartholomew, T. P. (2007). Female university students' perceptions of a sexual assault when victim and perpetrator gender are varied.
- Birdea, D. R, C. L Somers, and G. O Lenihan . "Effects of educational strategies on college students' identification of sexual harassment." 125.3 n.
- Menard, K. S., Hall, N., Phung, A. H., Ghebrial, E., & Martin, L. (2003). Gender differences in sexual harassment and coercion in college students: developmental, individual, and situational determinants.