

A Male Perpetrator's Sexual Orientation Affects Perceptions of Sexual Harassment Towards

Women

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Abstract

Past research has examined perceptions of sexual harassment where a perpetrator's sexual orientation is manipulated, but only with same-sex sexual harassment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that when a gay man sexually harasses a woman, people excuse it by referring to his sexual orientation. This study analyzes how a male perpetrator's sexual orientation affects perceptions of sexual harassment towards a woman. Three hundred and eighty-three participants read a scenario where a straight or gay man physically harasses a woman or has a benign conversation with her. Participants rated the severity of the situation and the perceived perpetrator sexual attraction towards the victim. In support of hypotheses, certain scenarios where the perpetrator was labeled as gay were considered less severe than when he was labeled as straight. Participants also perceived that a gay perpetrator was more sexually attracted to the woman when he harassed her versus in the control condition. Implications include the role that heterosexism plays in perceiving sexual harassment, and the persistence of the myth that sexual harassment occurs due to attraction towards the victim/survivor.

Male Perpetrators' Sexual Orientation Affects Perceptions of Harassment Towards Women

Sexual harassment is a pervasive social phenomenon that affects a wide variety of individuals across a multitude of different situations. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual behavior, such as verbal comments, sexual jokes, or physical touching (Fitzgerald, Gelfand & Drasgow, 1995; Stockdale et al., 2013). Common stereotypes surrounding sexual harassment typically involve a male perpetrator and a female victim, with both often assumed to be heterosexual (Shechory Bitton & Shaul, 2013). However, research has found that sexual harassment also occurs towards male victims, sometimes from female perpetrators, and also within male and female same-sex instances as well, regardless of the sexual orientations of the perpetrator and victim (Hill & Silva, 2005; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Prevailing stereotypes and preconceived notions about sexual harassment may lead to harmful consequences for victims, particularly those who have experienced “non-normative” sexual harassment. For example, there has been a history of legal courts deciding against sexual harassment victims in same-sex sexual harassment cases due to the perpetrator having a heterosexual orientation (Carlucci & Golom, 2016). Moreover, perpetrator intent is sometimes taken into consideration when judging the severity of sexual harassment (Carlucci & Golom, 2016), yet perpetrator intent is irrelevant to how sexual harassment victims may be affected by the behavior. Considering the vast amount of negative psychological consequences of experiencing sexual harassment, including alcoholism, depression, anger, and posttraumatic stress (Buchanan, Bergman, Bruce, Woods, & Lichty, 2009; Cortina, Swan, Fitzgerald, & Waldo, 1998; Wolff, Rospenda, & Colaneri, 2017), it is imperative to recognize sexual harassment when it occurs, regardless of the demographic factors of the perpetrator and victim.

While the majority of the research concerning sexual harassment has focused on situations where the perpetrator is male and the victim is female, there has been research concerning other forms of sexual harassment in recent years. This includes same-sex sexual harassment, as seen in Castillo, Muscarella, and Szuchman (2011); Carlucci and Golom (2016); DeSouza and Solberg (2004); and DeSouza, Solberg, and Elder (2007). Moreover, there has been research on harassment where the perpetrator is female and harasses a male victim, e.g. Hendrix, Rueb, and Steel (1998); Katz, Hannon, and Whitten (1996); Runtz and O'Donnell (2003); and Shechory Bitton and Shaul (2013). Furthermore, though much of sexual harassment research has focused on occurrences within the workplace, sexual harassment has also been found to be an issue among friends and peers. Hill and Silva (2005) found that 62% percent of college students have been sexually harassed, with 80% being harassed by peers. Clodfelter, Turner, Hartman, and Kuhns (2010) also found that 22.7% of the surveyed college students had experienced sexual harassment, and the vast majority of perpetrators were other students (92.9%), while half (50%) of the perpetrators were also strangers to the victim.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine perpetrator sexual orientation on the perception of male-to-female sexual harassment. First, I detail the current research on the role that attraction to the victim versus gendered power serves as a motivation for sexual harassment. Then, I explain how implicit beliefs about gender may impact a person's perceived capability to harass others. Finally, I suggest that implicit beliefs about sexual orientation, especially about gay men, further affect their perceived capability to harass others. Together, this study provides a framework for understanding the effects of implicit beliefs on judgments of "non-normative" sexual harassment.

Attraction to the Victim Versus Gendered Power

Though increasingly more research is being conducted on “non-normative” occurrences of sexual harassment, lay beliefs appear to propose that sexual attraction plays a role in harassing behavior. DeSouza et al. (2007) analyzed if the sexual orientation of a perpetrator affects how participants perceive female-to-female sexual harassment in a mock-jury setting, and found that participants are significantly less likely to view a behavior as harassment if the perpetrator is a heterosexual female than when the perpetrator is a lesbian. The authors discussed that a possible reason for this could be that participants perceived the heterosexual perpetrator as lacking sexual attraction towards the victim. Thus, there may be a positive correlation between participants’ perception of the perpetrator’s sexual attraction towards the victim and the perception of the severity of the harassment (DeSouza et al., 2007). In a similar study by Carlucci and Golom (2016), participants were again found to perceive sexual harassment as more severe when the perpetrator was a lesbian than when the perpetrator was heterosexual. However, the authors attributed homophobia and negative attitudes towards lesbians as a possible explanation for this, but participants’ possible homophobia was not measured in the study (Carlucci & Golom, 2016).

Some research posits that sexual harassment is an abuse of gendered power, such as MacKinnon (2003) and Uggen and Blackstone (2004), who argue that sexual harassment occurs due to a need for power and control in accordance to the sociocultural power that men hold over women. Sexual harassment as an abuse of power has also been studied in regards to occupational hierarchies rather than gender, for example: Elias, Gibson, and Barney (2013); McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone (2012); Popovich and Warren (2010); and Wilson and Thompson (2001). Being that sexual harassment victims in the workplace are majority female (Uggen &

Blackstone, 2004; Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003), including in instances of contrapower sexual harassment where a male employee harrasses a female supervisor or boss (Rospenda, Richman, & Nawyn, 1998), as well as considering the frequency of sexual harassment occurring towards women from peers (Clodfelter et al, 2010; Hill & Silva, 2005), it is suggested that the societal inequality of women is a significant factor in the prevalence of sexual harassment in and outside of occupational settings (Berdahl, 2007; MacKinnon, 2003; Stockdale, Berry, Nadler, Ohse, & Bhattacharya, 2013). In instances of sexual harassment where the perpetrator is female, the harassment may be an attempt to protect or inflate her social status by imitating what is considered to be “male” sexual aggression (Berdahl, 2007). In instances of male-to-male sexual harassment, the perpetrator may be attempting to inflate his social status against another man; this also provides explanation as to why a heterosexual man would sexually harass another man without being sexually attracted to him (Berdahl, 2007; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1988). Consequently, contrary to popular belief, sexual attraction may play a lesser or even nonexistent role in why sexual harassment occurs.

Implicit Beliefs about Gender and Sexual Orientation on Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

Gendered power may serve as a possible explanation as to why there has been a recent noted phenomenon in feminist and LGBT circles whereby gay men are not held accountable for sexually harassing women (Strathman, 2014). Anecdotal evidence suggests a gay man may excuse his behavior by referring to his sexuality (e.g., “It’s okay, I’m gay”), implying that sexual harassment is only serious when it is motivated by sexual attraction. To outside observers, gay men may be perceived as less threatening than heterosexual men and perhaps be more similar to heterosexual women, and therefore believed to be less likely to commit sexual harassment

towards women. Indeed, research has consistently found that participants perceive sexual harassment that is perpetrated by a woman as less severe and serious than sexual harassment perpetrated by a man (Katz et al., 1996; Runtz & O'Donnell, 2003; Shechory Bitton & Shaul, 2013). This is likely due to prevailing social beliefs that women are not sexually aggressive, and are consequently less likely to be sexually violent (Crawford, 2012). Likewise, research has found that beliefs in implicit inversion theory, or the belief that "homosexuals are similar to opposite-sex heterosexuals" as defined by Deaux and Kite (1987) (p. 83), are still relevant and common among the general population (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006; Mitchell & Ellis, 2011).

Mitchell and Ellis (2011) explored the implicit inversion theory by showing 783 participants a video of two men talking to each other while labeling one of the men as gay in the experimental conditions and one of the men as adopted in the control conditions. Mitchell and Ellis (2011) found that when either of the men were labeled as gay, they were rated by participants as more feminine and less masculine than when compared to the control conditions. Research by Blashill and Powlishta (2009) and Fingerhut and Peplau (2006) has found similar results, finding that participants associate more feminine characteristics and interests with gay men than heterosexual men. If gay men are believed to be more similar to heterosexual women than heterosexual men as the implicit inversion theory describes, gay men may be perceived as unlikely to commit sexual harassment, especially towards women. However, following the arguments that sexual harassment occurs due to gendered power from authors such as Berdahl (2007), MacKinnon (2003), and Uggen and Blackstone (2004), as well as recognizing that gay

men still hold sociocultural power over women due to their gender, it must be acknowledged gay men are not immune to sexually harassing women.

The Current Study

There has been no previous research on the effects of perpetrator sexual orientation on the perception of male-to-female sexual harassment. The current study aims to investigate if the sexual orientation of a male perpetrator affects perceived severity of sexual harassment towards a woman. Drawing from examples by Bursik (1997) and Williams, Brown, Lees-Haley, and Price (1995) which used written vignettes to study sexual harassment, the current study used a written scenario to simulate a situation in which a man named Matthew or Michael, who is introduced as either straight or gay, sexually harasses a woman named Ashley or Jessica, respectively. This method was chosen in order to control as many variables as possible. Drawing from the discussed research on the prevalence of beliefs in implicit inversion theory, as well as the research which demonstrates that sexual harassment perpetrated by female harassers is not considered as severe as sexual harassment perpetrated by male harassers, the main hypothesis for this study is that, in conditions where the perpetrator is labeled as gay, the sexual harassment will be perceived as less severe than in conditions where the perpetrator is labeled as straight.

Additionally, because research has consistently found that women perceive sexual harassment as more severe than men and perceive a wider range of behaviors as sexual harassment than men do (Ivy & Hamlet, 1996; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001; Shechory Bitton & Shaul, 2013), it is also hypothesized that women will perceive the sexual harassment as more severe regardless of sexual orientation of the perpetrator. Following the research of Blashill and Powlishta (2009), Fingerhut and Peplau (2006), and Mitchell and Ellis (2011) which found

that participants believe gay men to be more feminine and less masculine than straight men, it is also hypothesized that in conditions where Michael/Matthew is labeled as gay, he will be perceived as more feminine and less masculine than in conditions where he is labeled as straight.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirteen participants were recruited through the Ramapo College Psychology Research Participation System and 200 were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk, which has been found to be a reliable source of high-quality data representative of the general population (Buhrmester, Kwang & Gosling, 2016). Participants recruited through the college participant pool were granted course credit, and participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk were compensated fifty cents. Data that did not pass the manipulation check verifying the sexual orientation of the perpetrator, were removed, which led to 383 participants for the final sample. In regards to demographics, 61.3% of participants were female, 69.7% of participants were White, and 91.6% were heterosexual. Participants were aged 18 to 76 with a mean of 27.2 ($SD=11.97$).

Materials and Measures

Michael/Matthew Summary

A short description of a man named either Michael or Matthew, which listed age, birthday, sexual orientation, single relationship status, hometown, university, workplace, and registered political party. Only the name and sexual orientation, which was either straight or gay, were manipulated (See Appendix A). Other characteristics were chosen to be neutral. Consequently, there were only four different summaries that participants could have seen.

Michael/Matthew and Jessica/Ashley Scenario

A written scenario which depicted Michael/Matthew interacting with a woman named Jessica or Ashley, respectively. Names were chosen based on popular names from 1995, which was the given birth year of Michael/Matthew. Participants were asked to carefully consider the following situation as if they were watching it in real time. There were four different scenarios that participants could have seen, each being three to five sentences long (See Appendix B). In the control conditions, the scenario had Michael and Jessica talk about their jobs and hobbies at a cashier line, to which Jessica says she went to the gym last weekend and then she departs. Or, Matthew and Ashley discuss the weather, current events, and what they do in their free time at a bus station, to which Ashley says she bought new clothes last weekend and then departs. In the experimental conditions, following the conversation, Michael “playfully pats Jessica on the rear” and Jessica expresses discomforts in the slap and leaves, or Matthew “playfully pats Ashley on the breast” and Ashley expresses discomfort in the pat and leaves. The relationship between the two is not specified. Since previous research has shown that physical actions are the most common forms of sexual harassment to be perceived unambiguously as sexual harassment (Ivy & Hamlet, 1996; Solomon & Williams, 1997; Terpstra & Baker, 1987), the scenario was written to be as unambiguous as possible. In order for a behavior to be considered sexual harassment, it must be unwelcomed by the victim (Fitzgerald, Gelfand & Drasgow, 1995; Stockdale et al., 2013), and thus Jessica/Ashley is written as expressing discomfort.

Sexual Harassment Manipulation Check

A single item asking the participant “Did you notice any inappropriate behavior in the scenario you read? If so, what?” The options presented were “No” or “Yes” with a write-in answer box, to ensure the participant noticed the correct behavior.

Severity of Sexual Harassment

A single item which asked the participant to rate the severity of the behavior (“On a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being very severe and 0 being not severe at all, how severely inappropriate was the behavior?”), on a scale of zero (not at all severe) to five (very severe). Participants in the control condition who did not notice an inappropriate behavior were instructed to select zero.

Degree of Sexual Attraction to Victim

A single item which asked the participant to rate the degree they believed Michael/Matthew to be sexually attracted to Jessica/Ashley, on a scale of zero (not at all attracted) to five (very attracted).

Gender Inversion Scale (Mitchell & Ellis, 2011)

A 24-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .832$) adapted from Mitchell and Ellis (2011) to test participant beliefs in gender inversion theory for Michael/Matthew. The traits listed, in order, were: Relaxed, Influential, Aggressive, Cooperative, Childish, Masculine, Intuitive, Sad, Successful, Interesting, Passive, Sensitive, Competitive, Soft, Feminine, Happy, Excitable, Emotional, Strong, Reputable, Hard, Mature, Likeable, Active. Participants rated the likelihood that Michael/Matthew was each trait on a scale of zero to five, zero being “He is definitely not [trait]” and five being “He definitely is [trait]”. The only traits used for analysis were Masculine and Feminine.

Sexual Orientation Manipulation Check

A single item which asked, “As mentioned previously, what is Matthew's sexual orientation?” Participants were emphasized to recall to the best of their ability and not to return to the previous pages.

Perception of Race

Because Matthew, Michael, Ashley, and Jessica are common Anglo-Saxon names and could affect participants’ perception of the characters’ race and thus the scenario (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Garcia & Abascal, 2016; Shin, Smith, Welch, & Ezeofor, 2016), a single exploratory item which asked “When reading the scenarios, what race(s) did you imagine [Michael/Matthew] and [Jessica/Ashley] to be?” was included.

Demographics

Four separate items which asked the participant’s age, gender, race, and sexual orientation, each with write-in answer boxes.

Design

This study utilized an experimental 2x2x2 factorial design with the between-subjects factors being the character name and scenario (Michael vs. Matthew; rear slap vs. breast pat, respectively), the sexual orientation of the perpetrator (gay vs. straight) and condition of the scenario (experimental vs. control). The dependent variables were severity of harassment, the perceived sexual attraction of the perpetrator towards the victim, and the gender inversion scale.

Procedure

The study was conducted online using Qualtrics in order to recruit as many participants in a short time frame. When participants were directed to the Qualtrics link, they were presented with the informed consent to consent to participate in the study. Qualtrics randomly presented

one of eight different conditions. The participant was then presented with the Michael/Matthew summary and was asked to read carefully. On the next page was one of four scenarios with Jessica/Ashley; participants were asked to carefully read the scenario and consider how they feel about the situation. The next page featured three items: the sexual harassment manipulation check, the severity of the sexual harassment, and the intensity of sexual attraction towards the victim. Next, they were given the Mitchell and Ellis (2011) gender inversion scale. The page which followed had two items: the sexual orientation manipulation check and the perception of race. The final page featured the four demographic items. Participants were then debriefed and thanked. Average completion time was four minutes.

Results

When running a 2 (Name/Scenario: Michael vs. Matthew) x 2 (Sexual Orientation: Gay vs. Straight) x 2 (Condition: Experimental vs. Control) between-subjects univariate ANOVA with the severity of the inappropriateness of the scenario as the dependent variable, no significant interactions were found. To investigate this further, the file was split by character name/behavior. When running a 2 (Sexual Orientation: Gay vs. Straight) x 2 (Condition: Experimental vs. Control) between-subjects univariate ANOVA for Matthew cases, a significant interaction between experimental versus control conditions and gay versus straight conditions was found, where the gay experimental condition ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.42$) had a significantly ($p < .05$) lower mean than the straight experimental condition ($M=4.14$, $SD=1.01$), $F(1, 191) = 5.03$, $p < .05$ (See Table 1). Running a 2x2 between-subjects ANOVA for Michael had no significant effects.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Severity of Inappropriateness in Matthew Scenarios

<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Condition</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
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Gay	Experimental	3.5	1.42	50
	Control	0.02	0.14	48
	Total	1.8	2.02	98
Straight	Experimental	4.14	1.01	50
	Control	0.09	0.28	47
	Total	2.18	2.17	97
Total	Experimental	3.82	1.27	100
	Control	0.5	0.24	95
	Total	1.98	2.1	195

Repeating the 2x2x2 between-subjects univariate ANOVA with the dependent variable being the perceived degree of sexual attraction from the perpetrator to the victim, main effects were found for character name/scenario ($F(1, 379) = 8.97, p < .01$), sexual orientation ($F(1, 379) = 358.14, p < .001$), and condition ($F(1, 379) = 210.86, p < .001$). These main effects were qualified by a sexual orientation and condition interaction, $F(1, 379) = 72.77, p < .001$. For the situations in which the perpetrator is labeled as gay, the experimental condition ($M=0.87, SD=1.31$) was found to be significantly higher than the control condition ($M=0.19, SD=0.6$), and the same was found to be true for the straight conditions, with experimental ($M=3.95, SD=1.05$) being higher than control ($M=1.37, SD=1.27$) (See Table 2). The significance of these differences were found to be $p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Degree of Perceived Sexual Attraction

Sexuality	Condition	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Gay	Experimental	0.87	1.31	99
	Control	0.19	0.6	89
	Total	0.55	1.09	188

Straight	Experimental	3.95	1.05	98
	Control	1.37	1.27	97
	Total	2.67	1.74	195
Total	Experimental	2.4	1.95	197
	Control	0.81	1.17	186
	Total	1.63	1.8	383

In addition, running a bivariate correlation found a moderate significant correlation between severity of inappropriateness and perception of sexual attraction ($r=.49$) (See Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between Severity of Inappropriateness and Perception of Sexual Attraction

Scenario	Condition	Correlations	Inappropriateness Severity	Sexual Attraction
Both	Severity of Inappropriateness	Pearson Correlation	1	.49**
		N	297	297
	Degree of Sexual Attraction	Pearson Correlation	.49**	1
		N	316	316

** Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

No significant gender differences in perceptions were found; the second hypothesis was not supported. The third hypothesis was supported: repeating the univariate 2x2x2 between-subjects ANOVA with ratings of masculine as the dependent variable found a main effect for sexual orientation ($F(1, 379) = 18.42$), with a significance of $p < .001$. Participants rated Michael/Matthew as significantly less likely to be masculine in the conditions where he was labeled as gay ($M=2.2, SD=1.28$) versus the conditions where he was labeled as straight ($M=2.77, SD=1.32$), $F(1, 381) = 18.55, p < .001$ (See Table 4). Repeating the same 2x2x2

ANOVA with ratings of feminine as the dependent variable also found that Michael/Matthew was more likely to be rated as feminine in conditions where he was labeled as gay ($M=1.88$, $SD=1.36$) than conditions where was labeled as straight ($M=0.84$, $SD=1.03$), $F(1,381) = 71.58$, $p < .001$ (See Table 5).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Ratings of Masculine

<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Gay	2.2	1.28	188
Straight	2.77	1.32	195
Total	2.5	1.33	383

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Ratings of Feminine

<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Gay	1.88	1.36	188
Straight	0.84	1.03	195
Total	1.35	1.31	383

In regards to the exploratory item, the majority of participants (90.5%) perceived the characters as White, including the majority of participants who were not White (88.5%). Additionally, 5% of participants answered the item by saying they did not think about race or that they cannot determine race from the scenario: 73.7% of these answers (labeled “Avoidant Ans.” in Table 7) were from White participants (See Table 6). There was no significant difference of perceptions between conditions.

Table 6: Crosstab Frequency Table for Perception of Race.

	Participant Race		Total
	White	Nonwhite	

Perceived Race	Both White	241	100	341
	Male White	5	2	7
	Female White	2	1	3
	Both Nonwhite	2	5	7
	Avoidant Ans.	14	5	19
Total		264	113	377

Discussion

The main hypothesis was partially supported. Participants perceived the sexual harassment from a gay perpetrator as less severe only when comparing the gay Matthew experimental condition to the straight Matthew experimental condition, where the perpetrator patted the victim on the breast. Interestingly, a significant increase in the perception of the perpetrator's sexual attraction towards the victim was found when comparing the experimental conditions to the control conditions for both the Michael and Matthew scenarios, including the conditions where Michael/Matthew was labeled as gay. The second hypothesis was not supported; there was no gender difference in perception of severity. In regards to the third hypothesis, the data were compatible with previous findings of Blashill and Powlishta (2009), Fingerhut and Peplau (2006), and Mitchell and Ellis (2011), in that the conditions where Michael/Matthew was labeled as gay had higher ratings of femininity and lower ratings of masculinity. However, there was no interaction between sexual orientation and experimental versus control conditions for ratings of either trait, meaning that Michael/Matthew engaging in sexual harassment had no effect on the perceptions of masculinity or femininity.

It possible that significant results for the first hypothesis were only found in the Matthew

scenarios because the behavior (a pat on the breast) was seen as more severe than the pat on the rear in the Michael experimental conditions, as a pat on the rear could be seen as more socially acceptable, and thus the scenario was not seen as severe enough to demonstrate a significant difference in conditions. Additionally, this would support the notion that individuals may judge the severity of sexual harassment based on the intent of the perpetrator rather than the harm experienced by the victim (Carlucci & Golom, 2016) if the participants did not believe that Jessica would be harmed by a pat on the rear regardless of condition. Though this study did not aim to compare different types of sexual harassment, this may provide insight on how different physical behaviors are perceived. Moreover, there was no interaction between gay versus straight conditions and experimental versus control conditions, including in Matthew scenarios, but this may be because of the strength of the main effects for each which overshadowed interaction effects.

The results which indicated that participants perceived Michael/Matthew as being more attracted to Ashley/Jessica when he harassed her regardless of sexual orientation provides insight on how individuals may view the permanence of a gay sexual orientation, as well supports the notion that individuals may believe that sexual harassment must be motivated by sexual attraction. Michael/Matthew was also perceived as being more sexually attracted to Jessica/Ashley in the straight control conditions than in the gay control conditions, which implies that a heterosexual man talking with a woman may be perceived as inherently being potentially sexually attracted to her, even in situations where there is no sexual behavior. Given that the perception of the severity of inappropriateness and the degree of the perpetrators' sexual attraction were also found to be moderately correlated, it is possible that participants perceive

more inappropriate situations as being motivated by higher sexual attraction, or that higher sexual attraction creates a more inappropriate situation.

Participants' perceptions of Michael/Matthew's femininity and masculinity were unchanged if he engaged in sexual harassment. In regards to conditions in which Michael/Matthew was labeled as gay, this may have occurred because the judgments of sexual harassment were influenced by heterosexism and homophobia. That is, even though the gay perpetrator is violating expected behavioral norms by acting incongruent with beliefs that gay men are feminine, and the gay perpetrator is believed to be more sexually attracted to the victim than in the control conditions, participants would still not rate him as more masculine due to not considering a gay man as threatening as a straight man, regardless of threatening behavior. These findings are consistent with Duran, Renfro, Waller, and Trafimow (2007) which found that a person's stereotypical expectations of a gay man is unlikely to change despite observing stereotype-inconsistent behavior from a gay man.

There are certain limitations to the current research. First, the dependent variable used to assess perceptions of the sexual harassment was severity, and not if participants considered the behavior to be sexual harassment or not, which differs from previous research which utilized mock juries and other methodology (e.g., Carlucci & Golom, 2016; DeSouza, Solberg, & Elder, 2007). Though the sexual orientation of participants was asked, there was not a sufficient amount of non-heterosexual participants ($n=32$) to find any significant differences in data. Future research should aim to find if non-heterosexual participants perceive the harassment and perpetrator differently than heterosexual participants, as little research has been conducted on this matter. However, Simon, Glässner-Bayerl, and Stratenwerth (1991) found that gay men

self-stereotype themselves as feminine with similar rates to heterosexual men, and this suggests that the ratings of Michael/Matthew being more feminine and less masculine when he is labeled as gay would remain consistent with gay male participants.

Given that Michael/Matthew and Jessica/Ashley were overwhelmingly perceived as White, future research should also investigate if perceptions of the perpetrator and situation differ if the one or both of the individuals are not White. The results also provide insight on the prominence of White being the “default” race for perceiving hypothetical situations, even for non-White individuals. This follows previous research which finds that “neutral” names are typically considered White by default (Cotton, O’Neill, & Griffin, 2014). It may also be due to a large portion of participants being recruited within the United States, where “American” is often associated with “White” (Devos & Banaji, 2005). Furthermore, “avoidant answer” participants being majority White follows previous research which indicates that some White people (often labeled “colorblind”) may purposely avoid discussing race for fear of being perceived as prejudiced (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Goff, Jackson, Nichols, & Di Leone, 2013).

Other limitations of the current study include the lack of non-White and non-heterosexual participants, as well as the study being conducted online, which may have made it susceptible to false reports (Lefever, S. , Dal, & Matthíasdóttir, 2007). Moreover, participant perceptions may have differed if the participant viewed the situation as being between friends or strangers. Research has found that sexual harassment which occurs between strangers is viewed more negatively than harassment which occurs between known coworkers (McCarty, Iannone, & Kelly, 2014). Additionally, because physical harassment elicits the most negative responses compared to non-physical harassment (McCarty et al., 2014; Marks & Nelson, 1993), the

one-to-five Likert scale for measuring the perception of severity may have caused a ceiling effect to occur, leading to a difference in the perception of severity in each scenario and preventing them from being analyzed together, as well as overshadowing any interaction between sexual orientation and experimental versus control condition.

This study is the first of its kind for researching how the sexual orientation of a perpetrator affects the perception of sexual harassment towards a cross-gender victim. Though this study focused on a noted phenomenon of gay men harassing women, future research could also investigate, for example, how situations involving a male victim and a lesbian perpetrator are perceived. Future research should utilize scenarios which have varying levels of severity, as well as aim to recruit a more diverse pool of participants. Knowing the high prevalence of peer sexual harassment (Clodfelter et al., 2010; Hill & Silva, 2005) and the seemingly prevalent belief that sexual harassment is motivated by sexual attraction, more research should be conducted to investigate the complexities of sexual harassment across a wide range of situations, as well as to investigate possible perpetrator motivations in order to better understand the phenomenon. As we have seen in the history of jurors deciding against sexual harassment victims due to the perpetrator having an “incompatible” sexual orientation with the harassment (Carlucci & Golom, 2016), an understanding of the prevailing beliefs surrounding sexual harassment is crucial to protecting victims and survivors of sexual violence. Moreover, it is vital to understand people’s perceptions of gay men, in order to better understand how homophobia implicitly functions. It is imperative that beliefs surrounding sexual harassment are investigated in order to take steps to prevent harassment from occurring.

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Appendix A: Character Description

[Michael/Matthew] is 22 years old and was born on March 13th, 1995. He is [gay/straight] and not in a relationship. He grew up in Wellsville, New York. He attended the University of Albany and currently works at a Costco. He is registered as an independent voter.

Appendix B: Written Scenarios

Michael Experimental:

Michael is talking with Jessica at a cashier line as they wait to get checked out. They begin to talk about their jobs and their hobbies. Jessica asks Michael what he did this past weekend and Michael says he went to the gym, to which Jessica replies that she also went to the gym last weekend. Michael compliments her, saying he can tell she works out, and playfully slaps her rear. Jessica expresses discomfort with the slap, and then it's her turn on line to get rung up by the cashier.

Michael Control:

Michael is talking with Jessica at a cashier line as they wait to get checked out. They begin to talk about their jobs and their hobbies. Jessica asks Michael what he did this past weekend and Michael says he went to the gym, to which Jessica replies that she also went to the gym last weekend, and then it's her turn on line to get rung up by the cashier.

Matthew Experimental:

Matthew and Ashley are sitting outside at a bus stop waiting for the bus. They begin to talk about the weather, current events, and how they spend their free time. Ashley asks Matthew what he did this past weekend, and Matthew says he bought new clothes. Ashley replies that she also bought clothes last weekend and got the shirt she's currently wearing. Matthew compliments her, saying the shirt looks great on her, and playfully pats her breast. Ashley expresses discomfort with the pat, and then her bus arrives and she leaves.

Matthew Control:

Matthew and Ashley are sitting outside at a bus stop waiting for the bus. They begin to talk about the weather, current events, and how they spend their free time. Ashley asks Matthew what he did this past weekend, and Matthew says he bought new clothes. Ashley replies that she also bought clothes last weekend, and then her bus arrives and she leaves.