

It is important to rethink sexual harassment by addressing the following question: Because most men do not harass women, why do men tend to be resistant to admitting the breadth and depth of sexual harassment in organizations? The author posits that because men and women do not understand each other's standpoints on sexual harassment, a gap exists between men's and women's understanding of what sexual harassment means. Specifically, men's *power over* standpoint and the related fear of marginalization clash with women's *power with* standpoint and the related fear of physical harm. The author concludes by suggesting that engaging in a dialogue with the goals of understanding and accepting other standpoints is necessary before sexual harassment can be approached in a humanistic manner.

DIALOGUE THROUGH STANDPOINT

Understanding Women's and Men's Standpoints of Sexual Harassment

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The prevalence of sexual harassment in organizations is well documented (see Hemphill & Pfeiffer, 1986), as are the resulting organizational, individual, and social costs (see Paetzold & O'Leary-Kelly, 1993). Despite the prevalence and costs of sexual harassment, strong antiharassment policies did not emerge in large numbers until the courts determined that survivors of sexual harassment could sue for damages (Wood, 1992).

Not only does sexual harassment continue to be a significant organizational problem, but also it is, more specifically, a problem for communication scholars. According to Kreps (1993),

Communication is the primary medium through which sexual harassment is expressed; it is the means by which those who are harassed respond to harassment, and it is also the primary means by

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which policies for eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace can be implemented. (p. 1)

Not only is communication a medium for sexual harassment, as Kreps contends, but research also suggests that sexual harassment *is* communication. According to Bingham (1994), sexual harassment can be conceptualized as a discursive practice. A discursive focus places communication at the core of sexual harassment so that it is “not understood merely as what occurs during the enactment of harassing behavior or in the reception/interpretation of harassing messages. A discursive framework understands communication as creating and shaping social reality rather than just being influenced by it” (Bingham, 1994, p. 9). Discourse becomes a primary means of both maintaining and changing oppressive sexual harassment practices.

The continuing problem with sexual harassment in the workplace suggests that prevention and intervention strategies have been ineffective in stopping sexual harassment (Kreps, 1994). It is clear that previous conceptualizations of sexual harassment have been inadequate to manage the problem effectively. Consequently, researchers need to make dramatic changes in the way we research and conceptualize sexual harassment if we are to assist managers in the creation of productive changes in organizations. The purpose of this article is to provide a framework for rethinking sexual harassment in organizations. Consistent with feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1987), I argue that men and women experience and construct sexual harassment in organizations differently. Consequently, managers need to understand both standpoints to create effective policies.

To begin the process of understanding multiple standpoints, managers should look to different experiences because of external differences between men and women. Researchers have begun to contend that, all things being equal, there are few sex-related differences between men and women in general and in organizations more specifically (e.g., Canary & Hause, 1993). When it comes to gender, however, all things are not equal. There are important power differentials between men and women in organizations. Even when men and women occupy the same formal position, men

are both given and take greater power than their female counterparts. For example, Propp (1995) found that information introduced by men is more likely to be accepted by a group than information presented by women, even if the styles of presentation are the same. According to Tavris (1992), although men and women do not differ greatly in biology or social behavior, there are important external and contextual differences in terms of "power, income, and other resources" (p. 95).

Because of the external and contextual differences between men and women, there are distinctly different gendered experiences in organizations (Krone, Carter, & Szwapa, 1995; Marshall, 1993). The same issue can be experienced differently, and therefore socially constructed differently, by men and women.¹ One such issue is sexual harassment. Of particular interest, then, is how sexual harassment is constructed in organizations through communication processes. Specifically, it is important to understand the different constructions of sexual harassment by women and men. According to Wood (1993), "Perhaps the most foundational issue for research on sexual harassment is increasing understanding of alternative ways in which various behaviors are construed by different individuals" (p. 16). Although most men and most women are not personally involved in a harassing situation, they still actively construct what it means to be sexually harassed. As a result, the social construction of sexual harassment occurs not only during talk about sexually harassing experiences but also during talk about the *possibility* of sexually harassing experiences. If managers are to understand the complexity of sexual harassment in organizations, then the social construction of sexual harassment by all members of the organization must be considered. It is likely that the tensions created by the different constructions of sexual harassment by men and women can decrease the quality of the work environment in terms of both satisfaction and productivity.

In this article, I argue that because men and women do not understand each other's standpoints on sexual harassment, there is a gender gap in our construction of what sexual harassment means. In other words, women and men may use the same language when referring to sexual harassment but assign different meanings to that

language. These differences are best understood in terms of power dynamics and the feminist standpoint theory. Specifically, men hold a *power over* standpoint that serves as a basis for a fear of marginalization through accusations of sexual harassment and organizational policies that men perceive may lead to a silencing of their voices. The masculine standpoint clashes with women's *power with* standpoint and the related fear of physical harm.² In no way does this article advocate that all men and all women experience organizational communication processes, such as sexual harassment, in identical manners. However, there appear to be points of intersections and commonalities among men's experiences and women's experiences that could greatly enhance our understanding of men's and women's experiences with sexual harassment.

In support of my argument, I first discuss feminist standpoint theories as a means for understanding and analyzing differing experiences. Next, men's standpoints concerning possible and actual experiences with sexual harassment are examined followed by a discussion of women's standpoints of possible and actual experiences with sexual harassment. Finally, the implications of differing standpoints of sexual harassment in organizations are considered. By comparing sexual harassment from men's and women's standpoints, researchers can begin to better understand the dynamics of sexual harassment and how to intervene to create effective sexual harassment policies.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORIES

According to Krone et al. (1995), "Continuing to search for the best way to operationalize and measure gender across interaction contexts seems less significant and socially useful than exploring questions related to the social construction of gender perceptions and gender relations in the work place" (p. 4). Along with other communication scholars (Allen, 1998; Bullis, 1993; Buzzanell, 1994; Putnam, 1990), they recommend the use of feminist standpoint theories to study marginalized voices in organizations. More specifically, Wood (1994) argues that a feminist standpoint

theory could provide a better understanding of sexual harassment in organizations.

Feminist standpoint theories require that researchers look beyond the dominant social construction of reality to give voice to and understand marginalized groups. Traditionally, women's voices have been muted in organizations in favor of the dominant male perspective. Women who do not act like men are considered deficient (Tavris, 1992). Similarly, the accepted version of sexual harassment as a simple problem that can be managed with simple solutions (Kreps, 1994) tends to come primarily from a privileged location, specifically from those with organizational power over others and, consequently, those who have least to fear from acts of sexual harassment (Wood, 1994). To expand on these ideas, I explore the basic tenets of feminist standpoint theories, briefly engage in the ongoing debate over feminist standpoint theories, and explore ways feminist standpoint theories can inform a reconceptualization of sexual harassment.

According to Hartsock (1997), feminist standpoint theories are based on two foundational issues. First, standpoint theories are derived from feminist standpoint epistemologies, which are most clearly articulated by Hawkesworth (1989):

Drawing on historical materialism's insight that social being determines consciousness, feminist standpoint theories reject the notion of an "unmediated truth," arguing that knowledge is always mediated by a host of factors related to an individual's understanding of reality and hence inform all knowledge claims. (p. 536)

Not only are feminist standpoint theories epistemological in nature, but they are also "inseparable from its political motivation and force" (Hartsock, 1997). Consequently, the second foundational issue for feminist standpoint theories is an emphasis on political activism. Feminist standpoint theories not only help generate an understanding of differing standpoints, but they also are designed to help create important personal and social change. In other words, the intent of both researchers and managers using a feminist standpoint theory to better understand sexual harassment cannot be to merely articulate differences. Similar to other gender-related issues

(e.g., the glass ceiling; see Buzzanell, 1995), traditional sexual harassment policies create the illusion of change and caring. Researchers and practitioners can use feminist standpoint theories to create real change in how sexual harassment is managed in organizations. I propose the creation of change through productive dialogue between groups with differing standpoints.

Hartsock (1987) builds on the epistemological and activist foundation of feminist standpoint theories by suggesting groundings for gendered differences. Multiple visions of feminist standpoint theory have been suggested by various theorists (Collins, 1986; Hartsock, 1987; Hekman, 1997; Swigonski, 1994). Hartsock (1987) lays out five claims that are essential to a standpoint. The first claim is that our groupings or “material life” both structure and limit our understanding of social relations (p. 159). Second, differing positions within society have created a system of dualisms that privilege the dominant group while devaluing other groups. Consequently, there is an epistemological bias in favor of the dominant group. Third, and of particular interest to the present discussion, because of their social power, the dominant group tends to create a perverse reality through its power to define terms for all groups. Not only does this claim emphasize the importance of power relations in standpoint theories, but it is also highly relevant to the historical and contextual development of sexual harassment. According to Wood (1992), despite the prevalence of sexually harassing behavior in organizations, the term *sexual harassment* was not even coined until the 1970s.

A fourth claim made by Hartsock (1987) is that standpoints are achieved. They are not immediate. Because of the dominant group’s control over what constitutes reality, marginalized groups must work to understand not only their own standpoints but also the underlying structures of the dominant standpoint. Women are able to achieve this understanding because “women are valuable ‘strangers’ to the social order” (Harding, 1991, p. 124). Because women are outside the dominant order, they are able to use their outsider status to both observe and identify problems with the social order. Because some men dictate the terms of the social order in the United States, they may be unable to see social interaction as

clearly as women. However, feminists do not immediately understand various standpoints on sexual harassment simply because they have a desire for that understanding. Similarly, researchers cannot achieve an understanding of various standpoints on sexual harassment simply by reading work by other authors. Rather, researchers must struggle for an understanding of the various standpoints. Fifth, Hartsock (1987) claims that because feminist standpoint theories have the ability to reveal underlying "perversions of both life and thought," they can be used to create change (p. 162).

One additional component that informs the interpretation of feminist standpoint theories for this article is suggested by Harding (1991). She contends that because we live in a gender-stratified society, men and women are assigned different roles that shape experiences differently (p. 121). Consistent with Hartsock's standpoint theory, standpoints are not immutable or inherent within a group of individuals (Welton, 1997). To the contrary, because our roles are shaped more by external forces than by innate differences (Tavris, 1992), standpoints tend to be socially constructed (Hirschmann, 1997) and, consequently, subject to change. Although Harding (1991) endorses the importance of starting research from a woman's perspective, she emphasizes the point that women's perspectives do not represent truth and are not always admirable. Women's perspectives should be the starting point, not the ending point of human research.

Despite the power of feminist standpoint theories as an alternative lens to the dominant vision, there are some possible problems. Standpoint theories are wrought with controversy. Researchers must justify their use of the theories and actively engage in the theoretical debate.³ In this vein, I articulate the most pressing issues in the standpoint theory debate, then position my arguments within the debate. The most intense focus of controversy has been the supposed contradictions between feminist standpoint theories and postmodernism (Hekman, 1997). Although both theoretical orientations have played an important role in the development of feminist scholarship, they are based on seemingly opposing viewpoints. The key point of departure between the theories is feminist standpoint theories' emphases on similarities within groups. Although

there clearly are differences among women depending on their social groupings, there also are similarities that tie women together. As Hartsock (1997) contends,

I do not mean to suggest that the experience of the women who manufacture Nike shoes in Vietnam bears much similarity in the phenomenological specific to the lives of First World academic women. But I do want to suggest that we are linked in important ways which we need to understand more systematically. (p. 95)

Similarly, Collins (1986) contends that scholars from different oppressed groupings have similarities: "The groups have pointed out that certain basic ideas crosscut multiple systems of domination" (p. 32). Although Collins argues that there are differences between Black feminist standpoints and White feminist standpoints, there are also points of intersection that can serve as the basis for mutual understanding and action. Clearly there are similarities that must be theorized and understood.

In short, of particular interest to the present discussion of feminist standpoint theories is their ability to highlight different standpoints of sexual harassment. Although many authors have examined outcome- or consequence-related issues, such as sexual harassment policies (Kreps, 1994) and experiences with sexual harassment (Clair, 1994), researchers have yet to examine what constitutes differing sexual harassment standpoints. Wood (1994) suggests that "standpoint theory contributes to discursive conceptions of sexual harassment by directing us to ask from what perspective—from whose position in society—definitions of social life are crafted" (p. 24).

In this section, I discussed the importance of feminist standpoint theories to rethinking sexual harassment, provided an overview of feminist standpoint theories, and engaged briefly in the controversy surrounding feminist standpoint theories. If managers are to implement effective sexual harassment policies, they must understand how differing standpoints inhibit effective dialogue between men and women. In an attempt to facilitate this process, I now discuss men's standpoints of sexual harassment, followed by a discussion of women's standpoints of sexual harassment.

MEN'S STANDPOINTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A simplistic assessment of men's roles in the construction of sexual harassment would be that men resist engaging in discussions about women's social construction of sexual harassment because it would mean admitting their dominant social position. In other words, men view sexual harassment as an acceptable way to continue their oppression of women. After several disturbing conversations with men I respect as profeminist, I had to admit that something deeper was happening. The men discussed deeply held fears that normal behavior would be perceived as harassing and that women would falsely accuse them of sexual harassment. Writings in both popular culture (e.g., Kurth, 1994; Tannen, 1994) and in the social sciences (Nicks, 1996) suggest that my friends are not unique in their fears. Furthermore, although there are cultural differences, African American men experience similar fears, especially if the charges are from a White woman (Staples, 1993). I realized that men may fear marginalization and the silencing of their voices through the abuse of sexual harassment policies. I further realized that my experience as a woman in an organization had prevented me from understanding their standpoints as men in organizations.

Masculinity should not be viewed as a monolithic characteristic adhered to in the same way by all men (Hearn, 1993). It is more accurate to discuss masculinities, reflecting the multiple constructions of masculinity (Mumby, 1998). Despite the recognition of differences in masculinities, Mumby (1998) argues that masculinist subjectivities "experience empowerment through concentricity. That is, men—as 'concentric subjects'—have a common center by virtue of the dominance of patriarchy in contemporary society" (p. 166). It is important to remember that men experience the center in varying degrees and varying ways. For example, Mumby (1998) argues that there are multiple hegemonic masculinities that take different forms but still are based around the idea of masculine domination. In an analysis of two ethnographies, Mumby (1998) concluded that although white-collar masculinity and working-class, shop-floor masculinities differed, they were constructed "si-

multaneously as hegemonic and resistant” (p. 171). Similarly, although African American males construct masculinity differently than European American males, the resulting construction of power is similar to the centric construction of European American males (see Dougherty & Duncan, 1998). Concurring with standpoint theorists, Mumby argues that men’s dominant societal position, particularly White heterosexual men, allows them to proceed through their daily experiences in a “largely unreflective fashion” (p. 167). Consequently, to varying degrees, men are not self-reflective enough to understand either their own standpoints or the standpoints of marginalized others.

In this section, I intertwine the sexual harassment literature as it relates to power and fear to outline a masculine-centered standpoint of sexual harassment: I review literature examining how men view sexual harassment, discuss the role and meaning of power to men who are socially constructing sexual harassment, and conclude by examining the role of fear in men’s social construction of sexual harassment. I recognize that because there are multiple masculinities with race- and class-related differences (Hearn, 1993), the standpoint presented here represents men with varying degrees of accuracy.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

There are two main lines of research relevant to a discussion of how men tend to view sexual harassment. The first suggests that men view fewer behaviors as harassing than women, and the second suggests that men tend to perceive most harassing behavior as normal. Research shows that men and women do not perceive the same behaviors as sexually harassing. For the most part, men do not experience as many sexual overtures as harassment as do women (Berryman-Fink & Riley, 1997; Booth-Butterfield, 1989; Garlick, 1994; Hemphill & Pfeiffer, 1986; Mongeau & Blalock, 1994; Thacker & Gohmann, 1993). When males do recognize that the behavior is harassing, they may feel complimented by the experience (Diehl, 1996). A study of high-school students’ experiences with sexual harassment concurs with Diehl’s conclusion (Trigg & Wit-

tenstrom, 1996). Early experiences with sexual harassment are of profound significance because of the importance of early educational institutions in the socialization of acceptable professional organizational behavior. Trigg and Wittenstrom (1996) found that as long as the harassment was from a thin female, the high school boys were boastful and congratulatory about their experience. Unwanted sexual attention was experienced by the males as enjoyable.

Additional research suggests that what men perceive as normal behaviors women would label as harassing. For example, although male harassers may recognize that others view their behaviors as harassing, they deny wrongdoing, claiming that their behavior is "normal" (Sundt, 1996). Berryman-Fink and Riley (1997) concluded that the male tendency to provide alternative labels "reveal their perception that sexually suggestive, sexually aggressive, and sexually harassing communication is an expected part of the male sex role" (p. 39). In a sense, these men would be correct. Because the masculine experience is dominant, masculine sexuality as control is normative. Wood (1994) argues that historically men have viewed sexual harassment as part of "normal life" and something that men do to women (p. 19). Because to men power, sexuality, and communication are inextricably tied (Landis-Schiff, 1996), they are unable to understand why women find this "normal" behavior disturbing.

POWER

As mentioned previously, there is some agreement that masculinities are centered around constructions of power and domination (Hearn, 1993; Mumby, 1998; Spitzack, 1998) and that power and gender are central to issues of sexual harassment (Bingham, 1994; Grauerholz, 1994). Previous literature, however, has not drawn a clear picture of how gendered constructions of power may provide insight into why many men view fewer behaviors as harassing and more harassing behaviors as normal than do women. To understand a male conception of power and its centrality to their experiences in organizations, both power and its link to men's sexuality must be analyzed. Most of the definitions of power outlined by men center

around the idea that power is obtained by controlling others (Dougherty, 1996; Dougherty & Duncan, 1998). Wood (1994) argues that our culture “instructs men to gain and exercise power over others and, consequently, to feel proud when they do so” (p. 21). This “power over” conception holds true both in organizations (Hearn, 1993; Wood, 1994) and in men’s sense of their sexuality. According to Landis-Schiff (1996),

Our ability to control is inextricably connected to our self-worth and to the true measure of our masculinity. This includes our sexuality. Much of traditional male sexuality is embedded in a “power over” world view. This means exerting dominance and mastery over others while maintaining self-control and composure in sexual relationships and in sex itself. (p. 16)

Payne (1993) concurs when she argues that there is a myth of power in which men perceive a hierarchical power balance in sexuality. A personal illustration emphasizes the embedded and reflexive nature of the power over orientation toward power. A male friend of mine from another organization asked if he could read an earlier draft of this article. Focusing on this section of the article, he argued that most men do not view power as the ability to control others. A few moments later he explained that women in his organization were likely to falsely accuse a man of sexual harassment because of their need to dominate or control others. Although denying that he conceptualized power as the ability to control others, his power over perspective emerged in his construction of sexual harassment.

The power-over conception of power emerges in men’s visions of relationships. Relationship literature is particularly relevant to the present discussion because many men are unable to distinguish between organizational romance and sexual harassment (Witteman, 1993). An underexamined element of Gilligan’s (1982) research provides some explanations.⁴ Gilligan asked men and women to write stories about pictures depicting connectedness and autonomy. The men were more likely to create stories of violence when viewing pictures of connectedness than when viewing pictures of autonomy. It seems that when in relationships, men tend to feel a need to demonstrate a hierarchy, often through violence

(Wood, 1997). This finding was supported by Owen's (1989) work on relationship metaphors. Both men and women perceived men as proactive and inflexible. For example, the men were described as "rocks" and "big strong rulers" (p. 46). Owen also found that the theme of leading was found primarily in male metaphors: "Male proactivity was illustrated in images of guiding, pointing the way, controlling or initiating and teaching" (p. 47). An analysis of Gilligan's and Owen's studies suggest that men view relationships in terms of their ability to control them. Organizational research literature also suggests that men view organizational relationships similarly to romantic relationships: "It is unclear where harassing communication begins and communication reflecting the natural development of cross-gender friendships and ORs [organizational romances] end" (Witteman, 1993, p. 35).

The link between men's romance and sexual harassment provides support to researchers who contend that sexual harassment is a means of controlling women (Diehl, 1996; Landis-Schiff, 1996). Research indicates that sexually explicit messages from higher status men is more likely to be interpreted as sexual harassment by observers than are messages from men of equal or lower status (Solomon & Williams, 1997). Barr (1993), however, concluded that hierarchical status did not influence perceptions of sexual harassment. In Barr's study, coworkers were as likely to be perceived as harassing as supervisors. What Barr fails to discuss is the unequal social power men have over women (Diehl, 1996). Women are likely to perceive men as powerful, even when they are equal on the organizational chart.

It is clear that masculine standpoints of power as domination are an important factor in male constructions of sexual harassment in organizations. A summary of the previous discussion would suggest that men perceive much controlling sexual behavior as normal and are, therefore, unlikely to label it as harassment. Harassment, after all, suggests deviant behavior. Normal behavior (controlling through sexuality) cannot be deviant and, therefore, cannot be sexual harassment. Furthermore, because many men find harassing behaviors to be pleasurable, they may construct harassing behaviors toward women as attempts to compliment or flatter them.

FEAR

According to Brody, Lovas, and Hay (1995), there is “no systematic literature on whether gender differences in reported fear vary in different situational contexts” (p. 50). Some organizational communication and organizational behavior research has briefly discussed the role of fear in organizational exit (Flam, 1993) and as it relates to sexual harassment (Grauerholz, 1994). Other research has provided statistical backing to the importance of fear in sexual harassment (Nicks, 1996). However, researchers have yet to discuss the implications of fear and sexual harassment. It is likely that gendered constructions of fear are an important component of differing standpoints on sexual harassment.

Fear is a complex, social construction (Brody et al., 1995) that can be harmful or adaptive, given the situation and the response to that situation (Myers, 1989). Men and women experience a broad range of fear in organizations. Many of these fears link to fear of economic instability and loss of identity (Flam, 1993). Although individuals experience a complex array of interrelated fears, they are likely to orient toward a fear that causes a disruption in routines (Weick, 1995). These disruptions provide a warning that all is not well (Weick, 1995). I argue that different sexual-harassment-related fears tend to cause disruptions for men and women. Although these fears vary culturally (e.g., Staples, 1993), there seem to be gender-related commonalities across cultures.

Although men experience complex fears regarding sexual harassment, I focus on the relationship of fear to constructions of power. Instead of describing dominant men’s behavior as motivated by a need to hold power over others, this explanation is based on the fear of giving power to others. Because men view relationships in terms of hierarchical power, there can be no equal relationships (Grauerholz, 1994; Tannen, 1994; Wood, 1994). This may be why in a study asking participants to rate the fear they would experience in eight situations, men rated themselves as equally afraid of men and women when presented with stereotypically negative male behaviors (Brody et al., 1995). Although, depending on the context, most men may equally fear men and women, it is likely

that they experience this fear quite differently. By sharing power with women, men believe that they are giving women the power to control them. Hence, if men choose to name sexual behavior in organizations as sexual harassment, then they are giving power to women. By giving power to others, many men fear being controlled by women and, in the process, losing their voices. The fear of marginalization may create insecurity among men about their continued employment and about their families' security. Consequently, men are likely to resist the significance of sexual harassment in an attempt to avoid creating policies that they fear will disempower them by allowing for false accusations of sexual harassment.

Tannen (1994) describes the idea that men fear marginalization. In her work, she analyzed a play about sexual harassment by David Mamet. Tannen concluded that "the ability to yell 'sexual harassment' gives women students that kind of power over him [the protagonist], since any one of them could, in theory, fabricate a charge and destroy him" (p. 250). Tannen argues that men fear charges of sexual harassment. Her claim is supported by a statistical analysis of men's fears of sexual harassment (Nicks, 1996). Fear of unwarranted sexual harassment accusations had changed the way many male professors interacted with their students (Nicks, 1996). One man's experience with sexual harassment (Shedletsky, 1993) suggests why men fear unwarranted sexual harassment charges:

When one is accused formally, it is important that we do not abrogate the freedom of speech of the accused, even when that accusation involves a reference to sexist ideas, or any ideas that the community may abhor. Disempowering a group—the accused—is not the way to provide equality of opportunity. (p. 82)

First, Shedletsky's experience, if it is a fair representation of the event, provides an example of a situation in which a man was marginalized and in the process lost his voice. In this instance, the woman's voice became dominant, and the man's standpoint was marginalized. Furthermore, the accuser's experience was privileged over the accused's experience. Second, this example clearly illustrates the male perception of power. By accepting sexual harassment policies, men believe that women will become dominant

and men will be disempowered. This fear is strongly held, although the power imbalance in organizations means the scenario rarely presents itself (Tannen, 1994). The negative implications of accusing someone of sexual harassment are so strong that women rarely report it, even when actual sexual harassment is occurring (Conrad & Taylor, 1994; Tannen, 1994).

Because men tend to view power as the ability to control others, they treat power as a zero-sum gain. What one party gains, the other party loses. By giving power to women, many men believe that women will hold power over men. If women hold power over men, then men may become marginalized and, consequently, silenced.

WOMEN'S STANDPOINTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Although women's standpoints on sexual harassment are complex, conflict between perceptions of power and fear may prevent men and women from understanding each other's standpoints. Power and fear, as they do for men, play an important role in women's construction of sexual harassment. However, many women experience power and orient toward fear very differently from men, and, as a result, their standpoints on sexual harassment are also very different. In this section, I examine research findings concerning women and sexual harassment. I then examine some women's constructions of power and fear, while noting that women of color's experiences vary from White women's experiences of sexual harassment (see Kramarae, 1992). The standpoint presented in this article represents different women with varying degrees of accuracy.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Although research examining women's experiences with sexual harassment is fairly extensive, three issues seem particularly relevant to the present discussion. First, as discussed previously from a male perspective, women label more behavior as harassing than do men. Second, given the prevalence of sexual harassment in organi-

zations, it seems likely that women also view sexual harassment as normal: "For many women, sexual harassment is experienced many times, everyday. It is so common and so integral an aspect of men's interaction with women that, as Gloria Steinem reminds, 'A few years ago this was just called *life*' (1983, 149)" (Kramarae, 1992, p. 102). Third, attempts at resistance can both recreate and alter the patriarchal environment that encourages sexual harassment.

Because the first issue has been adequately covered in the section reviewing men's perceptions of sexual harassment, I begin with a discussion of sexual harassment, women, and perceptions of normalcy. Sexual harassment is so prevalent in the lives of women that not only do a significant number of adult women experience sexual harassment (Hemphill & Pfeiffer, 1986) but 15% of women report first experiencing sexual harassment in elementary Grades 1 to 5. Of women, 36% report first experiencing sexual harassment in Grades 6 through 8 (Trigg & Wittenstrom, 1996). One conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that women are socialized from their earliest experiences in organizations to believe that sexual harassment is normal behavior. However, for women, normalcy cannot be equated with acceptability. Trigg and Wittenstrom (1996) found that the high school girls in their study of sexual harassment in secondary education reported that although sexual harassment was prevalent, it was a dramatically hurtful experience. They concluded that girls "bore the brunt of the negative consequences" (p. 58). Furthermore, girls were 3.7 times more likely to change their normal behaviors than were boys after a sexually harassing experience (Trigg & Wittenstrom, 1996). This is true of my own experience as a sixth grader. Until I was in the sixth grade, I was a self-assured athlete who competed successfully against boys and girls. One day, I was playing a modified version of tennis, when my male partner grabbed my crotch. I could not believe it. The fact that many people saw this incident and did nothing about it told me for the first time that I was an object. I was not as good as my athletically inept partner and never could be because of my sex. From that day forward, I never went to recess again. Instead, I sat in the library and read books during lunch. Any book was acceptable as long as it allowed me to escape from reality. I do not have fond memories of my elementary school experience. Although this boy's behavior

was viewed by many in Western culture as normal, it was far from acceptable.

The normalcy but unacceptability of sexual harassment extends beyond socializing organizations, such as educational institutions, to women in professional organizations. Women in organizations, especially when they are in men's organizations, are certainly not the norm. In fact, over half of all women who are now employed work in jobs that are at least 80% female (Coontz, 1995). The majority of jobs that women hold are those that mirror traditional beliefs about women's roles (Coontz, 1995). Further, women managers are still found primarily in low-paying service organizations, whereas traditional masculine fields still tend to hire male managers (Blum, Fields, & Goodman, 1994). Because they have actively overcome cultural and social norms against working in male-dominated fields, women are unlikely to equate normalcy with acceptability. Women have been fighting against the blind acceptance of normal practices throughout U.S. history (see Norton, 1989). The preceding discussion helps create an understanding of why men and women experience normal behavior differently. To men, normal behavior tends to be constructed as acceptable and therefore nonharassing. To women, normal behavior is more likely to be constructed as unacceptable and as clearly harassing (Grauerholz, 1994). Because organizations are created and dominated by men, the consequence of the differing perceptions of normalcy is the labeling of women who object to sexual harassment as "abnormal" (Wood, 1994, p. 19) or as a "feminine defect" (Diehl, 1996, p. 9). For example, women who object to sexual harassment are often viewed as lacking a sense of humor. Thus, women's experiences with sexual harassment and constructions of the possibility of sexual harassment are trivialized by institutionalized sources of power (Svoboda & Crockett, 1996).

A third issue discussed in the sexual harassment literature is resistance to sexual harassment. Because women do not tend to find normal harassing behavior acceptable, and because their voices are silenced or trivialized by the dominant construction of sexual harassment, it is important to understand how women tend to resist sexual harassment in organizations. Interestingly, resistance can both perpetuate and change the status quo (Clair, 1994). Clair

(1994) argues that “both dominant and subjugated individuals actively participate in the status quo” (p. 60). She contends that sexual harassment victims’ use of narratives, although seeming to resist sexual harassment, actually reinforces the environment that gave rise to those behaviors. Although Clair’s analysis is compelling, her participants’ narratives also can be viewed as a form of tactical resistance, in which resistance is strategically hidden within seemingly typical behavior (Foss & Rogers, 1994). Clearly, the complexity of resistance to sexual harassment makes it difficult to analyze and interpret.

Although some forms of resistance may reinforce the status quo, other types of resistance change the status quo. Clair, Chapman, and Kunkel (1996) contend that narratives have the power to raise consciousness about sexual harassment. One example of consciousness raising through narratives is found in Muir and Mangus’s (1994) article on narratives about the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings. They conclude that “all of these stories have contributed to a collaborative voice which is both therapeutic and empowering” (p. 103). The sharing of stories has shown the commonalities experienced by victims of sexual harassment. The authors contend that the sharing of narratives has had the largest impact on African American women. African American women have been taught that to speak out against an African American male harasser was to betray their race. The narratives told by African American women [according to Anita Hill] “were important for introducing the issue of sexual harassment into the culture and for legitimizing African-American concerns” (Muir & Mangus, 1994, p. 103)

POWER

Sexual harassment is a power issue, not a sexual issue (Payne, 1993). Two power issues must be examined to understand the role of power in women’s construction of sexual harassment. First, although many men tend to hold a power-over definition of power, women’s conception of power is far more complex because of their standpoints of subordination. Women must not only understand their own perspectives, but also the language, practices, and think-

ing of those who marginalize and oppress them. Although women are certainly aware of the masculine form of power as domination, they “inevitably come to experience power differently” (Grauerholz, 1994, p. 36). For women, power is a complex construct. Women tend to adhere to several different forms of power. Women tend to focus on personal power, or the ability to control themselves, communal power, or the control over others to strengthen the group (Grauerholz, 1994), or power with others where social change occurs by sharing power with others (Dougherty, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Marshall, 1993). One example of power with others is through shared narratives. By sharing stories of sexual harassment with others, women are able to increase their collective power. Women’s power-with construction of power is the focus of this article for two reasons. It provides a parallel to men’s power-over construction through which we can better understand men’s and women’s differing standpoints of sexual harassment, and, as the research on narratives suggests, that through power sharing, women have been most effective at raising consciousness of sexual harassment in organizations.

Although the power-with construction of power has not been addressed in a consistent manner in organizational research, it is often referred to in a more peripheral manner. For example, Rosener (1990) found that women leaders frequently mentioned their attempts to share power and information with others. The power-with perception of power is an extension of women’s relationship orientation. Although men view relationships in terms of hierarchy and control, women view relationships in terms of connectedness (Gilligan, 1982; Grauerholz, 1994). When asked to tell a story about pictures of connectedness and separation, women’s stories contained more violence as the distance between the people in the pictures increased (Gilligan, 1982). Similarly, Owen (1989) found that women drew pictures or used metaphors depicting connection more often than men. Both studies suggest that women draw strength and security from their connections. In other words, women gain power and identity by being in relationships (Wood, 1997). When contrasting women’s power sharing with men’s definition of power as domination, it is easier to understand the confusion and animosity

that frequently accompany discussions of sexual harassment. Men tend to believe that by sharing power they actually are decreasing their own power. Women believe that by sharing power they are increasing their own power. Women cannot understand why men refuse to share power, because by doing so, men would increase their own power. Men cannot believe that women, once given power, will not use it to silence men's voices.

A second element of power relevant to issues of sexual harassment is women's tendency to feel powerless in our society. According to Payne (1993), "feelings of powerlessness appear to be the single strongest element that continues to perpetuate sexual harassment. When women believe they are powerless or have no choice, they fail to act" (p. 145). Interestingly, despite the importance of perceptions of powerlessness in women's standpoints of sexual harassment, most research discussed men's need to control women, but failed to discuss women's experience of powerlessness (e.g., Kramarae, 1992; Payne, 1993). Kramarae (1992) claimed that men believe that women are subordinate, but never discussed what it means to women to feel less powerful than men in general. In short, it is important to understand what powerlessness means and how it is socially constructed by both men and women.

FEAR

Although women's fears regarding sexual harassment are complex, some fears are more immediate and, consequently, create a greater disruption in women's organizational routines (Weick, 1995). The threat of lost relationships and the resulting consequences and the threat of physical harm are just two of the complex array of fears women experience regarding sexual harassment. Because of their ability to hinder productive dialogue between men and women about sexual harassment, I focus on these two fears. In this section, I contend that whereas men orient toward the fear of marginalization from sexual harassment policies, women orient toward the fear of sexual harassment itself. Feminist standpoint theories contend that women are already marginalized. Women fear both the consequences of their marginalization and the possibility

of becoming further marginalized. Men also fear becoming marginalized, but for different reasons. In other words, it is the varying gendered standpoints that influence the experience of fear. I will focus on two manifestations of women's fears. Women fear sexual harassment because of its threat to their sense of connectedness, and women fear sexual harassment because of the sense of danger created when sexual harassment is threatened or occurs.

First, sexual harassment threatens women's sense of connectedness. Women view a world without connections as dangerous and frightening (Gilligan, 1982). This may be because, as the power-with conceptualization of power suggests, women gain power through their connections with others. One possible implication of women's experience of connectedness and fear of isolation is that many women may view sexual harassment as a threat to their connections and relationships and, ultimately, to their source of power. Researchers concur that women who express concern about sexual harassment are abandoned and isolated by their organization (Svoboda & Crockett, 1996). By fighting sexual harassment, women risk their relationships with both their coworkers and the organizations within which they are employed. Because women who are sexually harassed are being isolated from their relational connections, they also are being isolated from their sources of power. As a result, women tend to construct themselves as powerless when socially constructing sexual harassment. Women not only fear sexual harassment but also fear the sense of isolation and the powerlessness that accompanies it.

A second sexual-harassment-related fear women orient toward is based on men as the object of fear and on the ongoing nature of that fear.

Women's lives are dangerous and it is the acquisitive and potentially violent nature of male sexuality which is the cause of the danger. A fully justified fear of acquisitive and violent male sexuality consequently permeates women's—perhaps all women's—sexual and emotional self-definition. (West, 1987, p. 94)

The fear of male violence is not only important in organizations, but also is central to women's experiences of sexual harassment

(Grauerholz, 1994). Not surprisingly, women tend to fear men across situations more than they fear women (Brody et al., 1995). Interestingly, women count on the object of fear, men, to protect them from harm. The constant nature of fear women experience provides a compelling argument for why they are more likely to perceive sexual behavior as harassing and threatening. Because men usually have the ability to harm women, women are more likely to perceive men's behavior as threatening. Lyman (1987) described a case in which fraternity men came into a women's sorority while the women were eating, surrounded the women, and began to talk about penis envy while one man used a fake penis to demonstrate masturbation techniques. When the two groups got together to talk about the event, the women described the fear they felt from being surrounded by so many large men. The women found the event threatening, in part because of the physical posturing of the men. The men considered it to be a joke. The women considered the situation to be frightening. Interestingly, Caputi and Russell (1992) claim that:

Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood once asked a male friend why men feel threatened by women. He replied: "They are afraid women will laugh at them." She then asked a group of women why they felt threatened by men. They answered: "We're afraid of being killed." (p. 13)

Not only do women experience fear of men but they also experience fear on an ongoing basis, whereas men tend to experience fear sporadically (West, 1987). By simply leaving the situation, men's fear tends to be alleviated. Women, on the other hand, experience fear as a daily part of their existence (Tannen, 1994). Women and men perceive different behavior as sexual harassment because women perceive a constant threat of male violence, a threat that men do not share (Grauerholz, 1994; Tannen, 1994). This difference can be observed in men's and women's differing constructions of sexual harassment. For example, according to Diehl (1996), there are different implications of sexual harassment for men and women:

More important, the harassment would not alter his perception of himself. Although women may be stigmatized both socially and personally, men may not see the same happening to them. Finally men are rarely able to conjure up harassment situations that go on daily, or that singly are mildly abrasive but taken together pollute the work or learning environment. (p. 7)

Not only are women more strongly influenced by sexual harassment, but they also experience it as more perpetual and ongoing. Men may experience moments of fear, but that fear usually ends when the experience ends. Because women recognize the ongoing implications of sexual harassment, whereas men view sexual harassment as situational, men's and women's standpoint are very different. This difference should appear in the dialogue and narratives of those who have been involved in harassing situations and those who have not yet experienced sexual harassment. Consequently, although men and women attempt to engage in dialogue about sexual harassment, their different constructions may effectively turn dialogue into monologue.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this article was to provide a framework for rethinking sexual harassment in organizations. Although there is no universal standpoint for men or women (Hekman, 1997), there are some common threads for men's and women's standpoints of sexual harassment, including power and fear. In this section, I summarize how effective dialogue between men and women is hindered due to differing standpoints on sexual harassment, discuss the implications for managers, and offer some suggestions for future research.

STANDPOINTS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In general, research on sexual harassment has failed to explore how men and women, including those who are not currently involved in sexually harassing situations, co-construct sexual harass-

ment in organizations. This article links research on sexual harassment, power, and fear to provide an initial vision of gendered standpoints on sexual harassment. I conclude that men's and women's differing standpoints prevent them from engaging in effective dialogue about sexual harassment.

Men and women experience sexual harassment differently, in large part because of different orientations toward fear and power. Because of their power-over standpoint, men tend to orient toward fears of false accusations of sexual harassment. On the other hand, women's power-with standpoint leads women to orient toward fear of physical harm and loss of connectedness with others in the organization as a result of sexual harassment.

Fear in organizations has important implications for organizational change. Individuals in Western societies tend to create personal identities around their work (Flam, 1993). Because strong organizational fear is associated with the potential for a loss of "life chances" and personal identity (Flam, 1993, p. 65), it may provide strong motivation for both change and maintenance of the status quo. Men may be motivated to maintain the status quo because they tend to believe that altered perceptions of sexual harassment could lead to organizational exit and identity destabilization through the marginalization of their voices. On the other hand, women may be motivated to create change because maintenance of the sexual harassment status quo could lead to organizational exit and identity destabilization. Both parties believe that their position is reasonable, but because of their standpoint-related fears, they fail to understand and accept the reasonable representation by others. According to Tannen (1994), "Each group tends to dismiss the other's deep fears as unlikely to occur. Their own fears, however, thrive on the awareness of possibility" (p. 251). In other words, men's and women's fears have prevented organizational members from engaging in an honest dialogue, in which the parties involved attempt to meet each other's needs by honestly representing their own position and honestly understanding the positions of others.

It is important at this point to ask the question: Who is responsible for change? Feminist standpoint theories, if they are to achieve their maximum potential, are theories of change. Understanding

various standpoints is inadequate if there is no transformation of the status quo. Standpoint theorists also argue that men have a vested interest in not understanding either their own or other standpoints (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1987). If they recognized varying standpoints, men may feel compelled to question the status quo and, therefore, their central location within it. However, should women be exclusively responsible for societal change? And because many managers continue to be male, what role can they effectively play in creating positive organizational transformation? According to Mumby (1998), men can create critical change as an “insider within” (p. 167). In other words, men have a unique ability to disrupt the “circle/cycle of homosocial reproduction that keeps patriarchy in place” (Mumby, 1998, p. 167). The first step for male-created change is to critique and deconstruct the system of which they are a part. The transformational role played by men, including male managers, may be different from women’s outsider perspective, but it is still pivotal to altering the reproduction of sexual harassment in organizations.

IMPLICATIONS

When men and women engage in dialogue about sexual harassment, they may be using the same language, but with very different meanings. Consequently, when organizational men and women seem to reach agreement about sexual harassment policies, they may envision different processes and outcomes. The difference in standpoints and subsequent expectations for organizational action can be frustrating for managers who are attempting to create fair and effective sexual harassment policies. As Clair (1993a) articulated, “I define emancipatory discourse as that discourse that promotes dialogue rather than closure. I cannot offer the practitioner or the victim of sexual harassment specific recommendations that will result in ‘the best way’ to handle sexual harassment” (p. 148). Although there is no single correct way to manage sexual harassment, in this section, I provide some preliminary possibilities.

One reason policies have been ineffective in the past is the tendency of both researchers and managers to oversimplify a complex

problem (Kreps, 1994). Managers must recognize that sexual harassment is complex. There are multiple constructions of sexual harassment with which managers must contend. While men's constructions tend to be privileged (Wood, 1994), women's constructions tend to be sequestered (Clair, 1993b). The first step toward understanding the complexity of sexual harassment is to recognize both standpoints and sexual harassment policies as ongoing processes. It is not possible to fully understand sexual harassment or to create a policy to solve sexual harassment. Policies must be considered works in progress that can adapt to the changing needs of men and women. As organizational attitudes evolve, policies must change to reflect that evolution. Sexual harassment can be reconceptualized as a process by encouraging and listening to dialogue among men, among women, and among men and women. This dialogue can occur in formal and informal settings. Formal dialogue can be in the form of focus groups with a trained facilitator, preferably a feminist who has an understanding of feminist standpoint theories and sexual harassment. The facilitator must have struggled for an understanding of women's and men's standpoints of sexual harassment. Discussions about fear, power, sexual harassment, and men and women may help managers create effective policies that produce what Buzzanell (1995) refers to as real change as opposed to the illusion of change.

Managers can also encourage informal dialogue about sexual harassment. It is important to encourage informal dialogue about sexual harassment because, historically, it has been privatized and individualized by organizations (Clair, 1993a). Because sexual harassment has been individualized, it isolates victims (Clair, 1993a). It is important to note that not all organizations have a culture of trust and openness conducive to informal dialogue. If individuals feel hostile and mistrustful of management, they may perceive informal dialogue as a form of manipulation. Furthermore, hostile organizational members may use informal dialogue to further polarize men's and women's constructions of sexual harassment. This may serve to further isolate victims of sexual harassment. However, given a trusting and comfortable environment,

managers can use the concept of power with others to help organizational members learn from each other. One way to encourage informal dialogue would be to post newspaper articles, tasteful and possibly humorous cartoons, or other discussion items about sexual harassment in frequented locations. These items could serve to bring sexual harassment into the public sphere. They could also create a relaxed and natural starting point for discussions about sexual harassment. Another means of encouraging dialogue would be for managers to talk informally with employees about sexual harassment. These discussions would be most effective if used by managers who are comfortable engaging in informal conversations with employees. Engaging in a didactic interaction may create a greater psychological distance, decreasing the possibility for effective dialogue.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Several future research possibilities emerge from rethinking sexual harassment. First, although this article provides an initial understanding of differing standpoints of sexual harassment, additional research is needed to further explore the interaction of gendered standpoints to create a deeper understanding of the complexity of sexual harassment in organizations. One way to accomplish this would be through an examination of conversations about sexual harassment between men, between women, and between men and women. An analysis of different gendered interactions would create a better understanding of how men and women experience and talk about sexual harassment. Second, future research needs to focus on the construction of sexual harassment by all members of organizations, not just those who harass or those who have been harassed. For example, it is important to further explore why men who do not harass women are resistant to admitting the breadth and depth of sexual harassment. Third, researchers must begin to explore how the experiences of other marginalized groups interact with gendered standpoints to create a unique vision of sexual harassment. It is important to understand how race, class, and gender interact to create a complex construction of sexual harassment.

NOTES

1. The social constructionist approach was first identified by Berger and Luckmann (1967), who argued that "society should be understood in terms of an ongoing dialectical process composed of the three moments of externalization, objectivation, and internalization" (p. 119). Similarly, Garfinkel (1967) contends that society is ordered around ordinary events. Events are understood by imposing on them a framework of past experiences and present expectations (Goffman, 1974). There are differences between everyday social constructions, or sense making, and organizational sense making, because, in general, organizations are much less taken for granted than everyday life (Weick, 1995). Gender provides one frame for sense making in organizations. Biological sex serves as the basis for the social construction of gender (Pearson & Davilla, 1993; Wood, 1994)

2. It is important to note that I do not view power-over and power-with constructions of power as bipolar opposites. It is possible to view these terms as coexisting in space and time. For example, women may share power with other women to gain power over dominant forces in an organization. Historically, there is evidence that men tend to define power as the ability to control others (Hearn, 1993; Mumby, 1998; Spitzack, 1998), whereas women tend to increase power by sharing it with others (Marshall, 1993).

3. I would like to thank more than one anonymous reviewer for this insight. Postmodernists contend that each individual is fully unique (Hekman, 1997). Although feminist standpoint theorists have answered these charges in multiple ways (see Hekman, 1997; Welton, 1997), they have yet to indict the use of dualities to guide the debate. The idea that we must accept absolute difference or absolute similarities suggests a bipolar relationship in which dualisms are vying for the dominant position.

4. Although I recognize the criticism of Gilligan's (1982) thematic analysis of children's ethical patterns (see Tavris, 1992), her work on adult relationship patterns appears fundamentally sound.

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