The Effects of Objectification, Perspective, and Coping Knowledge on Sexual Harassment and Performance in Work Contexts

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Introduction

- Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997)
  - “The most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted—and arguably the most ubiquitous—is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body.”
- How did a gaze from the opposite gender affect math performance? (Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2011)
  - A confederate of opposite sex would give an objectifying gaze for 3-5 seconds to participants as they were asked to complete math assessments.
  - Females receiving a gaze lowered math scores.
  - Males receiving a gaze did not lower performance.
- Weiner, Gervais, Allen, and Marquez (2012)

They found their hypotheses to be correct.

- More pronounced in predictors than observers
- Predictors and Observers would report higher levels of performance
  - Females receiving a gaze lowered math scores.

Performance Measures from Experiencers

- Wonderlic scores
- Sexuality assessment

Results

- Performance
  - No effect with objectification in Experiencers for both:
    - Wonderlic Performance (Figure 1)
    - Abstract Sorting (Figure 2)
  - Effect for coping in Experiencers:
    - Abstract Sorting (Figure 3)
    - Predictors and Observers predicted stronger performance decrements by condition (Figures 4, 5).
- Harassment
  - No effect between harassment and coping conditions (Figure 6)
    - F(1, 270)=.206, p=.651
    - Except in Perspectives/Coping relationships
    - Predictors and observers rated higher on the sexual harassment reports depending on conditions.
    - In all three measures (Actor, Reasonable Person–Figure 7, Self)
    - F(1, 270)= 90.190, p=.000
- Predictors
  - Gave higher ratings for performance decrements and sexual harassment.

Methods

- Experiencer
  - Staged interview with trained confederates
  - Interaction was scripted and recorded on video
  - Told them we were assessing their ability to perform a work-related task
  - Would receive gazes from 3 male confederates
  - Completed Wonderlic assessment, an unscored creative assessment, and sorted research abstracts.
  - Completed questionnaires about the experience:
    - How they felt
    - How a reasonable person would view the interaction
- Predictors/Observers
  - Read a vignette describing the interview process (Predictors),
  - Or watched the video recordings (Observers).
  - Were then asked:
    - How the interviewee would perform on tasks following the interview?
    - If the encounter was sexually harassing from 3 perspectives:
      - Reasonable Person, Self, Actor
- Design: 3 x 2 x 2
  - Predictors, Observers, Experiencers
  - Coping vs. Non-Coping conditioning
  - Objectification vs. No objectification

Sexual Harassment Measures (RP) All Perspectives

- F(1, 60)=4.436, p = .040
- F(1, 60)= .620

Figure 1: Average Wonderlic Scores by Objectification Condition

Figure 2: Ab. Sorting Avg. Scores by Objectification Condition

Figure 3: Abstract Sorting Average Scores by Coping Conditions

Discussion

- Performance was not affected by objectification.
  - But perhaps by coping?
  - Differs from findings in Gervais et. al (2011)
  - Consistent with Weiner et. al (2012)
- Coping had no significant effects.
  - Except:
    - Abstract Sorting
    - Actor Prediction Surveys
  - Possible that it may have an effect, though not strongly correlated in this study.
- Benevolent Sexism
  - Those high in Benevolent Sexism may perform better than those who would rate lower (Glicks & Fiske, 1996).
  - So while performance overall may not be affected, individual differences may be found.
  - Further research is currently being done to examine these effects.

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