Individual Differences in Perception of Sexual Harassment in University Students

Deirbhile Malone¹ & Cillian McHugh^{1,2,3}

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Limerick, V94 T9PX

² PROGRESS Lab, Department of Psychology, University of Limerick

³ Centre for Social Issues Research, Department of Psychology, University of Limerick

Abstract

Sexual harassment has increasingly become a main topic of conversation in academia in recent years. This current study investigated the role of gender, gender identity, locus of control and social dominance orientation on perceptions of sexual harassment. 121 undergraduate students (60 females and 61 males) were presented with four questionnaires. A hierarchical multiple regression and mediation analyses were conducted to examine the data. Results indicated that women perceived a higher occurrence of sexually harassing behaviour than men. Gender identity and locus of control were not found to be significant predictors of perception of sexual harassment. Mediation analyses showed that there was a significant direct effect of social dominance orientation on the perception of sexual harassment with individuals who measured high in social dominance orientation interpreting less scenarios as sexually harassing while those exhibiting low social dominance orientation were more likely to perceive sexual harassment. With limited previous research identifying the role of social dominance orientation in the perception of sexual harassment, future studies should further examine this individual difference in a range of settings including workplace and third level education. Limitations of this study and recommendations for future research is outlined.

Keywords: Gender Identity, Locus of Control, Social Dominance Orientation, Sexual Harassment

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Sexual harassment has increasingly become a predominant area of conversation in recent years. A number of high profile cases have highlighted the issue within particular sectors (e.g., the movie industry, Helmore 2019), however, it is becoming progressively apparent that this is an issue that extends beyond a few isolated cases, and occurs in a diverse array of settings, including universities (Wolff, Rospenda, and Colaneri 2017). The #MeToo movement in particular has raised awareness of the extent to which this is an ongoing issue. The discussions surrounding the #MeToo movement, and, in particular, the related backlash, have highlighted a key issue regarding discussions of sexual harassment: there is little agreement on what constitutes “sexual harassment”. Here we investigate influences on perceptions of sexual harassment in a University setting within an Irish context.

The potential negative consequences for victims of sexual harassment may include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Avina and O’Donohue 2002), Depression (Street et al. 2007), Generalised Anxiety Disorder (Bastiani, Romito, and Saurel-Cubizolles 2019), and vulnerability to experiencing psychological distress (Huerta et al. 2006). For a student in a university setting, negative outcomes of sexual harassment may additionally include a loss of emotional stability, decrease in academic grades and insomnia (Hill and Kearn 2011). Victims may also hold the belief that their own actions were the cause of this unprovoked hostility (Reilly, Lott, and Gallogly 1986). In order to combat these negative effects it is necessary to understand the factors that can influence the emergence of sexually harassing behaviour. The disagreement on what constitutes sexual harassment is one such factor, such that perpetrators may continue engaging in problematic behaviours because they do not regard them as sexually harassing (Stanley and Wise 1987).

The difficulty in establishing agreement on what constitutes “sexual harassment” has long been acknowledged (e.g., Benson and Thomson 1982; Gutek 1985; Loy and Stewart 1984) and still remains unresolved and contentious today (Herbenick et al. 2019; Klein 2019). Over the past two decades, various authors have attempted to construct a viable and distinct understanding of the term, sexual harassment (e.g., Fitzgerald 1990; Frazier, Cochran, and Olson 1995; Tata 2000; van der Linden and Panagopoulos 2019; Welsh et al. 2006). However, as noted by Vega-Gea, Ortega-Ruiz, and Sánchez (2016) there is no all-encompassing definition of sexual harassment that includes gender, psychological, developmental, legal, sociological, organisational and psychoeducational approaches (Vega-Gea, Ortega-Ruiz, and Sánchez 2016). This lack of agreement on defining sexual harassment is also present in the general population, that is, sexual harassment can mean many different things to different people (Foulis and McCabe 1997).

Influences on Perception of Sexual Harassment

Specific contextual factors that influence the perception of behaviours as sexual harassment have been identified. For example, the severity of the behaviour in question influences whether or not it is perceived as harassing or not (Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett 2001; Tata 1993). Unsurprisingly, more severe behaviours, such as sexual coercion, are more readily identified as harassing than less severe behaviours, e.g., generalised sexist remarks (Ellis, Barak, and Pinto 1991; Fitzgerald 1990; Tata 1993). In addition to severity, other reported influences on perceptions of sexual harassment include the power dynamics at play, the social dominance orientations of both the victim and the perpetrator, and the attributes of the victim and the perpetrator (Tata 1993; see also Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018; Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett 2001; Tata 2000). If a person is in a position of authority, or of a higher status than an alleged

victim, their behaviour is more likely to be judged as sexually harassing (Cleveland and Kerst 1993; Collins and Blodgett 1981; Mishra and Stair 2019; Popovich et al. 1996; 1992; 1986; Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett 2001; Simon and Montgomery 1987; Tata 1993). Furthermore, people appear to be biased in favour of attractive harassers (Jacobson and Popovich 1983; LaRocca and Kromrey 1999; Popovich et al. 1996; 1992). Finally, gender of perpetrators has been found to influence perceptions, with male perpetrators being judged more harshly than female perpetrators (LaRocca & Kromrey, 1999).

In addition to these contextual influences, there may be differences in people's perceptions of the same behaviour, that is, people may disagree on whether a particular behaviour is sexually harassing or not (Booth-Butterfield 1989). Of particular interest, following the publicity and backlash relating to the #MeToo movement, is the apparent disagreement between the various parties that may be in a position to perceive instances of sexual harassment. Perpetrators and victims may not be agreement on whether a particular action is sexually harassing or not. For example, if an offensive verbal comment was made, the perpetrator may perceive this as a light-hearted remark but the victim may interpret it as sexual harassment. Similarly, some people may perceive sexually derogatory images as an entertaining interaction with friends while others interpret this as sexual harassment (Baird et al. 1995). Behaviour that is ambiguous in nature may be perceived differently by different parties leading to disagreements (Gutek & O'Connor, 1995).

Individual Differences in Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

One of the most widely discussed factors that influences perceptions of sexual harassment is gender (Cleveland and Kerst 1993; Quinn 2002). Females are consistently more likely to rate an ambiguous behaviour as sexually harassing than males (Blumenthal 1998; Dietz-

Uhler and Murrell 1992; Foulis and McCabe 1997; Frazier, Cochran, and Olson 1995; Jones and Remland 1992; LaRocca and Kromrey 1999; Powell 1986; Quinn 2002; Reilly, Lott, and Gallogly 1986; Reilly et al. 1992; Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett 2001; Street et al. 2007; Tata 1993).

In addition to gender, perceptions of sexual harassment have also been linked to gender identity (Foulis and McCabe 1997; Fox and Tang 2014; Powell 1986; Sheffey and Tindale 1992). Gender identity may be defined as the degree to which people identify themselves as members of a specific gender group (Dambrun, Duarte, and Guimond 2004; Snellman, Ekehammar, and Akrami 2009; Tajfel and Turner 1979). This identification is based on traditional or stereotypical beliefs about masculinity and femininity (Snellman, Ekehammar, and Akrami 2009, 1009). These constructs of masculinity and femininity are associated with stereotypical roles within sexual scripts (Wiederman 2005; 2015). Masculinity involves “dominance and assertiveness”, whereas femininity entails “subservience or submissiveness” (Carpenter 2015, 71; see also Gådin and Stein 2019, 922). The gendered nature of these roles means that the implications of identification with either construct vary depending on whether a person is male or female (Dambrun, Duarte, and Guimond 2004; Snellman, Ekehammar, and Akrami 2009).

It is well established that males perceive fewer instances of sexual harassment than females, it is therefore not surprising that, for males, being high in masculinity is also a predictor of perceiving fewer instances of sexual harassment, or to be more tolerant of sexually harassing behaviours (Foulis and McCabe 1997; Fox and Tang 2014; Powell 1986). Indeed, it has been found that men who are high in masculinity show an increased likelihood of engaging in harassing behaviours (Jacobs 1997; Powell 1986; Pryor 1987; Pryor and Stoller 2016; Sinn 1997), and it has even been argued that aggressive sexual behaviour, including sexual assault,

may be viewed as a means to assert masculinity (Sanday 2007; Seabrook and Ward 2019).

Conversely, males who score high in femininity are more likely to perceive more instances of sexual harassment (Foulis and McCabe 1997; Powell 1986).

Females who are high in femininity also perceive more sexual harassment than females low in femininity. However, women who score high in masculinity perceive more instances of sexual harassment than those low in masculinity (Foulis and McCabe 1997; Powell 1986). This means that, while the influence of femininity on perceptions of sexual harassment is the same for both genders (increased perception of sexually harassing behaviours with increased femininity), the influence of masculinity varies depending on whether a person is male or female. Males high in masculinity perceive less harassment whereas females high in masculinity perceive more (Foulis and McCabe 1997; Russell and Trigg 2004).

Two further variables of interest are social dominance orientation (Pratto et al. 1994) and locus of control (Perloff 1983; Rotter 1966). Locus of control (Gatz and Karel 1993; Perloff 1983; Rotter 1966) is a measure of the degree to which outcomes are perceived to be within one's own control (internal locus of control) or determined by external forces or chance (external locus of control). An individual can be internally orientated or externally orientated. The study of locus of control in relation to perceptions of sexual harassment may be particularly relevant given the widespread discussions of victim blaming (Boyle 2012; Freeman 2018; Nyúl et al. 2018; Royal 2019). Externally orientated people are found to be socially anxious and more likely to avoid social interactions (Lowe, Gormanous, and Kersey 1978), while internally orientated people are more relaxed in social interactions and have the belief that they can control any situation (Dudley 1977). Applied to the question of sexual harassment, previous research has found that those with an internal locus of control are less likely to label behaviours as

sexually harassing, while those with an external locus of control are more likely to label behaviours as sexually harassing (Barnett et al. 1992; Booth-Butterfield 1989; Foley and Pigott 2000; Frazier, Cochran, and Olson 1995; Jordan et al. 1998; Martin 2015; Olapegba 2004).

The final variable of interest here is social dominance orientation. Social dominance is defined as a preference for inequality between social groups (Pratto et al. 1994; Russell and Trigg 2004). Those high in social dominance orientation, generally see less instances of sexual harassment than those lower in social dominance orientation, furthermore males are generally higher in social dominance orientation than females (Russell and Trigg 2004). It has been hypothesised that the gender and gender role related influences on perceptions of sexual harassment may be linked with social dominance orientation (Pratto et al. 1994; Pryor 1987; Russell and Trigg 2004).

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; 1986) provides a framework for integrating these diverse findings (Maass et al. 2003; Maass and Cadinu 2016). Social dominance orientation is associated with the promotion of in-group members and denigrating of out-groups members (Russell and Trigg 2004). People who are high in social dominance are motivated to maintain intergroup inequalities, and in doing so they tend to perpetuate stereotypical gender roles and sexist ideologies, such that social dominance has been found to be associated with tolerance of sexually harassing behaviours (Pratto et al. 1994; Pryor 1987; Russell and Trigg 2004). Males generally score higher in social dominance orientation than females, so this also provides an explanation for the gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment described above. Indeed, sexist humour can be viewed as a device for promoting in-group cohesion (Thomae and Pina 2015), and group members who identify strongly with the in-

group (i.e., males who are high in masculinity) are more likely to engage in derogation of outgroup members.

The Current Research

Above we have identified key individual difference variables (gender, gender identity, social dominance orientation, and locus of control) that have been shown to be related to perceptions of sexual harassment. Previous research has tested these variables individually, and in various combinations along with other variables, however, to date there has been no investigation of the specific combination of all four of these variables and their relation to perceptions of sexual harassment. .

Furthermore, much of the research on sexual harassment has focused on the workplace (Booth-Butterfield 1989; Christopher and Wojda 2008; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018; Herovic, Scarduzio, and Lueken 2019; Josefowitz 1982; Lee 2018; McCabe and Hardman 2005; McDonald, Charlesworth, and Graham 2016; McDonald 2012; Mishra and Stair 2019; Sojo, Wood, and Genat 2016; Tata 2000; Wiener and Hurt 2000; Zhu, Lyu, and Ye 2019). While there have been investigations involving students in a University setting (MacNeela et al. 2018; Reilly, Lott, and Gallogly 1986; Tenbrunsel, Rees, and Diekmann 2019), we extend these to University students in an Irish context.

Based on previous research we hypothesise the following: (1) females will perceive more instances of sexual harassment than males; (2) (a) increased femininity will lead to higher rates of perceiving sexual harassment in both males and females, (b) increased masculinity will lead to reduced rates of perceiving sexual harassment in males, and higher rates in females; (3) higher social dominance orientation will be associated with lower rates of perceiving sexual harassment; (4) (a) an internal locus of control will lead to lower rates of perceiving sexual harassment while

(b) an external locus of control will lead to higher rates. Previous research has shown relationships between these variables (e.g., males are generally found to be higher in social dominance than females, Snellman, Ekehammar, and Akrami 2009; though this narrative is disputed, see Batalha, Reynolds, and Newbigin 2011). We will conduct exploratory analyses to investigate the possible interactions between these variables and their relative influences on perceptions of sexual harassment.

Methods

Design

A cross sectional correlational design was employed, with the criterion variable being perception of sexual harassment while the predictor variables were gender, gender identity, locus of control, and social dominance orientation.

Participants

121 undergraduate students from the a large Irish University voluntarily completed the questionnaires (61 men, 60 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.51$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.53$, range = 18-39 years). The inclusion criteria were participants who were current undergraduate students in the University and were over the age of 18. The participants were recruited through the University's Department of Psychology social media platforms on both Facebook and Twitter. No financial remuneration was given. A priori power analysis indicated that in order to detect an effect size of 0.15 with 80% power, a sample of 120 participants would be required for the study. An equal gender split was achieved by applying a filter on the survey file that only allowed a limited number of each gender contribute to the study, once the quota has been reached, no more participants of that particular gender were accepted. An alternative debriefing sheet was

presented to the excluded participants which offered them a concise explanation as to why they had been omitted from the study at such an early stage.

Materials

Materials included Questback Enterprise Feedback Suite Winter 2018 feedback software company, which presented a battery of questionnaires measuring the role of individual differences in the perception of sexual harassment and gathered this supporting data. The IBM SPSS software platform computer package (version 25) was used to statistically analyse these results. The PROCESS macro (Hayes 2012; Version 2.16; Model 4) with indirect effects estimated with 5000 bias-corrected and accelerated bootstraps (Hayes 2009) allowed for a further analysis to be conducted. The study required demographic information such as age and gender, alongside the four questionnaires as follows.

Personal Attributes Questionnaire. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ, Spence and Helmreich 1979) measures masculinity and femininity using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very true of me*) to 5 (*not all true of me*). Eight of the items represent masculinity (e.g., *competitive*) while the remaining eight determine the level of femininity (e.g., *gentle*) by describing the stereotypical characteristics of both genders. One statement that outlines the conventional man is aggression while emotional would describe the 'ideal' woman. Several items are reversed scored. Both scales demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .78$ for femininity and $\alpha = .63$ for masculinity **Social Dominance**

Orientation Scale. The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO, Pratto et al. 1994) consists of 14 items with two subscales: dominance and anti-egalitarianism, which both predict social and political attitudes. For example, '*It is probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom*' and '*We shouldn't try to guarantee that every group has the*

same quality of life'. Participants were required to score each statement based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 7 (*strongly favour*) with seven of the items being negatively worded. The highest score achievable was 98 and the lowest possible result was 14, giving a mean total of 56. In terms of reliability, this questionnaire reported a high level of internal consistency for the current sample, $\alpha = .90$.

Locus of Control Scale. The Locus of Control scale (LOC, Rotter 1966) determines the degree to which an individual is of the opinion that the consequences they experience throughout life is due to their own behaviour or is attributed to the external environment. Participants are presented with 29 pairs of statements and asked to select the one they agree with the most. For the majority of pairs of statements, one statement is indicative of an external locus of control, while the other is indicative of an internal locus of control, e.g., '*Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it*' (internal), paired with '*Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time*' (external). Statements indicative of an external locus of control are assigned a value of 1, and those indicative of an internal locus of control assigned a value of 0. A total locus of control score was calculated such that high scores demonstrated an external locus of control and a low score suggests an internal locus of control. There were six neutral pairs of statements that were not scored, e.g., '*Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality*' or '*It is one's experiences in life which determine what they're like*'. The locus of control scale demonstrated good internal consistency this sample, $\alpha = .70$.

Sexual Harassment Definitions Questionnaire. The Sexual Harassment Definitions Questionnaire (SHDQ, Foulis & McCabe, 1997) contained 16 vignettes each depicting a sexually harassing behaviour measuring the individual perception of sexual harassment. The items

included statements such as, *‘When at work, a male colleague deliberately brushes up against Mike when walking past, even though there is no need for this as there is plenty of room. Would you define this as sexual harassment?’* and *‘A male acquaintance of Jane’s has asked her out a number of times and each time she has refused to go out with him. However, he continues to persist in his requests for a date. Would you define this as sexual harassment?’* Response options were in a binary yes/no format, this dichotomous variable was used to enable participants to make a more definite and unambiguous verdict. “Yes” responses were assigned a value of 1 and “No” responses were assigned a value of 0; a total score was obtained by calculating the sum of the responses to the 16 questions. This resulted in scores ranging from 0 to 16, a higher score indicated that the participant defined more incidents as sexual harassment. The present study exhibited a very good internal consistency for the Sexual Harassment Definitions Questionnaire $\alpha = .90$.

Procedure

Students from an Irish University were informed of the study in an email distributed by the main investigator and the Department of Psychology’s social media platforms which contained a link redirecting the participants to Questback. No financial remuneration was offered. Before beginning the questionnaires, a consent form and information sheet was presented whereby each individual had the option to accept all conditions before continuing further. An in-depth description of both the risks and benefits of participation was included to ensure full disclosure to the distress the sexually harassing scenarios may cause. The study proceeded once consent had been given by the participants. Participants then provided some demographic information (age and gender). If the quota for the specific gender had been

reached, the participant was redirected to the final page which highlighted the reason for their exclusion from the study.

The first questionnaire presented was the Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (1966) which outlined 29 various statements with 23 measuring the extent to which an internal or external locus of control was present. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1979) followed this to assess the degree to which the individual identified as feminine or masculine which in turn determined their gender identity. Subsequently, The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (Pratto et al, 1994) illustrated eight dominance items and eight anti-egalitarianism items. The final element was the Sexual Harassment Definitions Questionnaire (Foulis and McCabe 1997). The study took approximately 15 minutes.

Upon completion a debriefing sheet was displayed, providing further information about the content and value of the research project and offered relevant contact details of both the researchers and the University counselling service in the event of the requirement of support due to the upsetting nature of the questionnaires.

Data was exported from Questback (Unipark 2013) and an analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS software platform computer package (Version 25, IBM Corp 2019). Results from the study were transcribed onto IBM SPSS Statistics software platform (version 25) and analysed to determine the nature of the findings. All information was kept anonymous and confidential. This research project was approved by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (2018_12_19_EHS).

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The data of 121 participants who completed the four questionnaires measuring perception of sexual harassment, locus of control, gender identity and social dominance orientation, were compiled for analysis. Descriptive statistics for factors included are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for predictor and outcome variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Range
Femininity	30.97	4.51	17.00	39.00	22.00
Masculinity	27.56	4.01	13.00	37.00	24.00
Locus of Control	13.35	3.86	2.00	21.00	19.00
Social Dominance	45.47	17.15	16.00	91.00	75.00
Sexual Harassment	9.91	4.56	.00	16.00	16.00

Note: *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum

Gender Differences

A series of independent samples t-tests revealed significant gender differences across all measures (see Table 2). Importantly, replicating existing research, we found significant gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment with females observing more situations as sexually harassing ($M = 10.95$, $SD = 3.81$) than males ($M = 8.89$, $SD = 5.00$), providing support for hypothesis 1, $t(119) = -2.55$, $p = .012$.

Table 2: Mean Difference on Scale Scores by Gender (N = 121)

		<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Sexual Harassment	Male	61	8.89	5.00	- 2.55	.012
	Female	60	10.95	3.81		
Femininity	Male	61	29.64	4.47	-3.41	.001
	Female	60	32.32	4.16		
Masculinity	Male	61	28.86	4.16	3.76	.000
	Female	60	26.25	3.42		
Locus of Control	Male	61	11.84	3.84	-4.72	.000
	Female	60	14.88	3.24		
Social Dominance	Male	61	51.66	17.61	4.28	.000
	Female	60	39.18	14.25		

A series of correlation analyses (Pearson's Correlation Coefficient) were conducted to investigate the relationship between the variables of interest. These are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation matrix of criterion and predictor variables (N = 121)

Variable	Perceptions of Sexual Harassment	Femininity	Masculinity	Locus of Control	Social Dominance
Sexual Harassment	1.00				
Femininity	.249**	1.00			
Masculinity	-.120	.134	1.00		
Locus of Control	.220*	-.248**	-.349**	1.00	
Social Dominance	-.526**	-.349**	.130	-.240**	1.00

Note: * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.001$.

Gender Identity

As expected, males reported a higher level of masculinity, $t(119) = 3.76, p < .001$ and females reported higher levels of femininity, $t(119) = -3.41, p = .001$. A significant positive correlation was present between femininity and perception of sexual harassment, $r = .25, p = .005$, providing support for hypothesis 2a. There was no significant correlation between masculinity and perceptions of sexual harassment $r = -.12, p = .190$. However, we hypothesised that the relationship between masculinity and perceptions of sexual harassment would vary depending on gender. As such we ran separate analyses for males and females. For females, there was no significant relationship between masculinity and perceptions of sexual harassment $r = .05, p = .717$. Similarly, males there was no significant relationship between masculinity and perceptions of sexual harassment, $r = -.11, p = .400$, and thus we failed to find support for hypothesis 2b.

Social Dominance Orientation

A significant negative correlation between social dominance orientation and perceptions of sexual harassment was found ($r = -.53, p < .001$) suggesting that those who scored higher in

social dominance were less likely to perceive sexually harassing behaviour, providing support for hypothesis 3.

Predictors of Sexual Harassment

Above we have found initial support for three of our four hypotheses, and partial support for hypothesis 2 (2a was supported but not 2b). We conducted hierarchical multiple regression to determine whether the predictor variables of gender identity, locus of control and social dominance significantly predicted the criterion variable of perception of sexual harassment (when controlling for each other). Each factor was submitted using the block wise entry method with age and gender being entered first, then femininity and masculinity in the second step, followed by locus of control in the third block and social dominance in the fourth.

The first block, containing age and gender significantly predicted perceptions of sexual harassment, $F(2,118) = 3.77, p = .026$, accounting for 4.4% of the variance in perceptions of sexual harassment. Upon observation, gender was found to be a significant predictor of sexual harassment in this block ($\beta = .216, p = .018$).

Masculinity and femininity were added in the second block, with masculinity * Gender included as an interaction term. The overall variance explained by the model increased to 7.4%, $F(5,115) = 2.90, p = .017$, and the addition of this block significantly improved the predictive power of the model, $F(3,115) = 2.81, p = .043$. With the addition of this block, femininity was the only significant predictor of the criterion variable in this block ($\beta = .218, p = .021$).

With the inclusion of locus of control into the third block, the overall model explained 7.8% of the variance in perceptions of sexual harassment, $F(6,114) = 2.70, p = .017$. However, this was not significantly greater than the previous block $F(1,114) = 1.998, p = .160$, and femininity remained the only significant predictor ($\beta = .201, p = .034$).

Social dominance orientation was entered in the fourth block, and the total model predicted 26% of the variance in perceptions of sexual harassment $F(7,113) = 6.927, p < .001$. In this final model, social dominance orientation was the only significant predictor of perceptions of sexual harassment ($\beta = -.47, p < .001$). Results of this hierarchical multiple regression are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictors of Perception of Sexual Harassment

	B	Std. Error B	β	Adjusted R^2
Block One				.044
Constant	5.420	3.474		
Age	.164	.162	.091	
Gender	1.955	.816	.216*	
Block Two				.074
Constant	2.026	5.879		
Age	.221	.161	.123	
Gender	-5.468	6.004	-.603	
Masculinity	-.395	.321	-.348	
Femininity	.220	.094	.218*	
Gender * Masculinity	.244	.217	.136	
Block Three				.078
Constant	-0.090	6.096		
Age	.220	.160	.123	
Gender	-6.105	6.009	-.673	
Masculinity	-.376	.320	-.332	
Femininity	.203	.095	.201*	
Locus of Control	.150	.118	.127	
Gender * Masculinity	.256	.216	.142	
Block Four				.257
Constant	10.710	5.835		
Age	.170	.144	.094	
Gender	-4.052	5.408	-.447	
Masculinity	-.084	.124	-.074	
Femininity	.076	.088	.075	
Locus of Control	.104	.106	.088	
Social Dominance	-.126	.024	-.473**	
Gender * Masculinity	.141	.195	.078	

Note: Criterion variable: Perception of Sexual Harassment, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Across the various blocks of the regression analysis, gender, femininity, and social dominance orientation were the only variables that significantly predicted perceptions of sexual

harassment. Therefore we found additional further support for hypotheses 1, 2a, and 3. The regression analysis failed to provide support for hypotheses 2b, 4a, and 4b.

The Importance of Social Dominance Orientation

A serial mediational analysis was conducted to further examine whether social dominance was mediating an effect of gender or femininity on sexual harassment. In the regression model gender proved to be a significant predictor in Block One of the hierarchical multiple regression model and the initial t test showed significant differences in perception of sexual harassment depending on gender, however, this effect was no longer present when femininity was added in Block Two. Similarly, femininity was shown to be a significant predictor in Block Two but when social dominance was included in the model in Block Four, femininity was no longer adding to the overall model. Social dominance orientation was observed to be the only significant contributor to the model and therefore the only significant predictor of perceptions of sexual harassment. Given these results we conducted a serial mediation analysis to investigate the relationship between the variables further.

No significant indirect effect was obtained of gender on perception of sexual harassment when femininity was the mediator as the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap passed through zero, $CI = [-0.26, 0.74]$ (see Figure 1). However, a significant indirect effect was found of gender on sexual harassment through social dominance, $B = 1.28$, $SE = 0.46$, $95\% CI = [0.44, 2.23]$ (see Figure 1). Additionally, a significant indirect was found of gender on perception of sexual harassment through femininity and social dominance, $B = 0.35$, $SE = 0.18$, $CI = [0.07, 0.76]$ (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Serial mediation analysis indicated directing and indirect effects linking gender to perception of sexual harassment, Note: $* = p < .05$, $** = p < .001$.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which gender identity, locus of control and social dominance orientation predicted perceptions of sexual harassment. Preliminary analyses provided initial support for hypotheses 1, 2a, 3, and 4. Females perceived more instances of sexual harassment than males (H1); being higher in femininity was associated with greater perceptions of sexual harassment (H2a); those higher in social dominance orientation perceived fewer instances of sexual harassment (H3); locus of control was related to perceptions of sexual harassment, with an internal locus of control predicting fewer instances of perceiving sexual harassment (H4a), and those with an external locus of control perceiving more instances (H4b). There was no significant association between masculinity and perceptions of sexual harassment (H3).

Further analysis indicated that social dominance orientation was the strongest predictor of perceptions of sexual harassment, and the only significant predictor when controlling for all variables (see Table 4). This was surprising given the extensive literature demonstrating gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment. However, our follow-up analysis showed that

gender differences in perception of sexual harassment are mediated by social dominance orientation (and by social dominance orientation through femininity).

We found that males scored higher in social dominance orientation and, perceived fewer instances of sexual harassment. These findings are consistent with previous research that reported a direct link between a high measure of social dominance orientation and perceiving a lower occurrence of sexual harassment (Pryor 1987; Russell and Trigg 2004). In line with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; 1986), individuals who exhibit high social dominance orientation encourage attitudes and beliefs that maintain this power imbalance between groups. In the context of gender based groups, this may include sexism, the endorsing of traditional gender roles and sexual scripts, and support for the idea that men should possess the power in heterosexual relationships (e.g., Pratto et al. 1994; Rosenthal and Levy 2010). These beliefs can have detrimental consequences for the way men perceive women which can result in sexually harassing behaviour. However, this also presents a range of challenges to men as they are expected to act according to these stereotypes and exhibit sexist ideologies that reinforce both power and dominance (Pratto et al. 2004). This could lead to a social desirability bias whereby male participants want to be perceived as the traditional 'ideal' male rather than an individual who exhibits low social dominance orientation and lacks power. In comparison to women, who throughout history have been expected to be submissive and less socially dominant orientated (Scott, Gilliam, and Braxton 2005).

This present research found that men perceived less behaviours as sexually harassing in comparison to women. This finding supports studies conducted by Russell and Trigg (2004) which indicated that men are more tolerant of sexual harassment than women while Jones & Remland (1992) also reported this gender discrepancy in the perception of sexual harassment.

Contrary to past research, gender identity was not consistently observed to be a significant predictor of sexual harassment. Powell (1986) showed that individuals who measured high in femininity interpreted more situations as sexually harassing whereas those who exhibited low score of masculinity recognised a higher occurrence of sexist behaviour while Rotundo et al. (2001) also identified the significant role of gender identity. Although this research found that men were significantly more masculine than women and women were more feminine than men, the mean difference between genders was small. We found some support for the role of femininity in influencing perceptions of sexual harassment, however, we found no evidence that perceptions of sexual harassment were related to masculinity. Therefore, the hypothesis that femininity and masculinity would be predictors of perception of sexual harassment was only partially supported. It is possible that the measure of gender identity employed here (the personal attributes questionnaire, Spence and Helmreich 1979) is dated and not representative of modern men and women in a university setting. Some of the items use words describing the stereotypical woman, including adjectives such as emotional, able to devote self completely to others and very aware of other people's feelings. Measuring femininity using these traditional constructs may not provide a modern perspective on gender identity as men can also possess similar attributes (Budgeon 2014). Conversely, masculinity is scored based on items which could be argued to be conventional beliefs about the 'ideal' man: self-confident, feels superior, stands up well under pressure and competitive (Clatterbaugh 2018). As this scale was constructed in the 1970s, it interprets gender in the traditional form as the items mentioned above could be argued to measure both masculinity and femininity which results in no separate distinction between genders (Spence & Helmreich, 1979). Gender stereotypes are being challenged on a regular basis and continuously develop to account for the contemporary interpretation of what it means

to be a man or a woman (Inglehart, Norris, and Ronald 2003). As women are consistently contesting sexist beliefs by gaining more power in the workplace and gradually obtaining more characteristics that were traditionally seen to be masculine such as competitiveness, this may account for the failure to replicate previous findings in this particular study (Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002).

The role of locus of control in perception of sexual harassment was also investigated in this current research. Previous studies have linked an internal locus of control to a decreased probability of interpreting behaviour as sexually harassing (Booth-Butterfield, 1989) while individuals who exhibited an external locus of control perceived more examples of sexual harassment (Perloff, 1983). Initial analysis found preliminary support for this relationship, however when controlling for the other variables recorded, locus of control was found to not be a significant predictor of an individual's perception of sexual harassment. It is important to note that the questionnaires were distributed among an educated population. The increased awareness of sexual harassment in recent years, particularly following the #MeToo movement and the rise of reports made in academia, may have resulted in the participants being more conscious of the prevalence of sexual harassment and the long-term consequences associated with it (Crittenden, Gimlin, Bennett & Garland, 2018; Monroe, 2019). As sexual harassment is gradually becoming a topic of conversation on social media and in everyday life, this in turn may cause people to be more understanding of victims and to attribute the harassment to the perpetrator involved rather than external or internal forces.

Limitations

Firstly, it is important to recognise that the scenarios presented were hypothetical and only measured how the participant believed they might feel in that particular situation.

Therefore, it is premature to suggest that the individual would act and perceive the event in a similar manner if they were to experience the sexually harassing behaviour in real life. It is also difficult for members of the opposite sex to relate to the vignettes that depict one particular gender for example a male participant associating with the 'If you were Jane' example and vice versa. The individual may not know how the other gender would react and as a result cannot make any assumptions in the way in which another person may perceive sexual harassment (Foulis & McCabe, 1997).

Secondly, previous research has indicated that male university students are more tolerant of sexual harassment than females (Reilly, Lott, Caldwell and Deluca, 1992) with the most significant gender gap in perceptions of sexual harassment being among university students. This discrepancy decreased once men had obtained work experience and became more cognizant of this behaviour (Booth-Butterfield, 1989). As a result, there may be a more significant gender difference in this study as all participants were current undergraduate students. This study may not be fully representative of the general population with regards to the perception of sexual harassment. However, as this particular age group progresses into the workforce, this gap will decrease accordingly.

Finally, recent years have seen considerable developments in the understanding of sexual harassment in universities which has resulted in the introduction of consent workshops (MacNeela et al, 2018). University students are gaining more knowledge around what constitutes as sexually harassing behaviour. Conversely, this could lead to a social desirability bias when reporting the amount of sexual harassment perceived by the individual. The participant does not want to be viewed as someone who is promoting this type of behaviour and therefore is more likely to conform to norms (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). There may be a higher

recognition of sexual harassment in this study as university students do not want to be perceived as a member of the outgroup as peers would then view them in an unfavorable way (Jetten, Hornsey & Adarves-Yorno, 2006).

Future Research

With the largest gender difference being among university students, it would be recommended to implement consent workshops and training on campus to reduce this discrepancy. Sexual harassment is a serious concern in academia and should be addressed accordingly. As research has shown that males tend to become less tolerant of sexual harassment once they gain work experience, future studies should address this and investigate what factors are influencing this change in perception (Reilly et al, 1992; Booth-Butterfield, 1989). Findings have shown, that before sexual harassment workshops only 28% of students were confident in their ability to determine if sexual consent was given in comparison to after the training, a substantial 60% of university students stated that they had acquired the necessary skills to determine if consent was present between both parties (MacNeela et al, 2018). This illustrates the importance of these workshops in universities and should be made compulsory to all students. The findings of this study can enforce the development of prevention strategies with regards to sexual harassment. Challenging social dominance orientation and its role in perceptions of sexual harassment, may be difficult, as it represents a persistent tendency to maintain intergroup inequalities (not just between genders). However, gender stereotypes should be continually challenged to change norms in order to account for variations in characteristics that can be interpreted as both male and female. Indeed in recent years, this has been accomplished to a small extent with gender fluidity and transgender becoming more common terms in society.

Future research on the role of social dominance orientation, locus of control and gender identity on perception of sexual harassment should be conducted in the workplace and in secondary level education in order to further comprehend this current issue. It would be suggested to obtain a larger sample size from a range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds as this study focuses mainly on undergraduate students who are an educated sample, are of similar age and are more aware of the discussion on sexual harassment.

In conclusion, this research identifies the significant role social dominance orientation has in the perception of sexual harassment among university students. As previous studies have rarely focused on this particular individual difference, it would be recommended to further examine how social dominance orientation is a major contributing factor to the way in which people interpret behaviour as sexually harassing.

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