Empathy Deficits and Perceived Permissive Environments: Sexual Harassment Perpetration on College Campuses

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is a common experience among college students, and its perpetration may be associated with deficits in perspective taking -- a form of empathy -- and institutional factors such as climates. This investigation compared reported outcomes after sexual harassment and perceptions of institutional support between perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment. A total of 579 students responding to a campus climate survey indicated that they were victims or perpetrators of sexual harassment in the past seven months. Perpetrators of sexual harassment perceived that their victims experienced far fewer negative outcomes than victims reported actually experiencing. Additionally, victims of sexual harassment had significantly worse perceptions of institutional support than did perpetrators of sexual harassment. This information can be used to inform primary and secondary prevention methods utilized by universities.

Keywords

Sexual Harassment; Perpetration; Victimization; Empathy; Institutional Support

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Rates of sexual harassment victimization among college students are alarmingly high, ranging from 40% to 62% among female students (Cantor et al., 2015; Kalof, Eby, Matheson, & Kroska, 2001; Rosenthal, Smidt, & Freyd, 2016), and LGBTQ students report higher rates of sexual harassment compared to heterosexual students (Hill & Silva, 2005). Within the general population, empathy deficits and perspective taking have been identified as key antecedents to sexual assault and sexual harassment perpetration (Pryor, 1987; Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006), but much less is known about factors that contribute to perpetration of sexual harassment among college students. In addition, organizational climates are strongly associated with the presence of sexual harassment in workplaces (Pina & Gannon, 2012), but the connection between the university climate and perpetration of sexual harassment on college campuses has not been explored. As such, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether empathy deficits are present among perpetrators of sexual harassment on a college campus and whether institutional culture is associated with the sexual harassment experience.

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Literature Review

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual violence is a continuum of sexually aggressive behaviors, which includes sexual harassment (Kelly, 1987). Sexual harassment in the workplace or academic settings includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is tied to or interferes with a person's employment or academic advancement (Sandler & Shoop, 1997). Sexual harassment can be perpetrated in-person or electronically and may include inappropriate verbal or written comments, making gestures, physical coercion, and showing pictures (Hill & Kearl, 2011). Gender harassment is a form of sexual harassment that degrades victims based on their gender, and it typically is absent of sexual advances by the perpetrator (Berdahl, 2007; Leskinen, Cortina, & Kabat, 2011). Gender based harassment also includes verbal and physical aggression perpetrated in order to uphold traditional views of gender roles and sexual orientation (Anagnostopoulos, Buchanan, Pereira, & Lichty, 2009; Slater, 2011). Individuals who do not fit these norms are targeted to uphold traditional views of gender roles and sexual orientation (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009). This study focuses on sexual harassment, specifically the facets of gender harassment, inappropriate sexual remarks, and sexual minority harassment experiences.

Outcomes of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment victimization among college students is associated with negative mental health, well-being, and academic outcomes. For example, Hill and Silva (2005) found that 68% of female students and 35% of male students identified as being upset by their sexual harassment victimization, while 16% of female students reported that their victimization hindered their ability to pay attention in class. Other research has found that college students who experience sexual harassment victimization have negative mental health and substance abuse outcomes (McGinley, Wolff, Rospenda, Liu, & Richman, 2016), including alcohol abuse, depression, and anger (Wolff, Rospenda, & Colaneri, 2017). LGBTQ sexual harassment victims report higher rates of educational disruption, embarrassment, feeling ashamed, and being afraid compared to heterosexual students (Hill & Silva, 2005).

Another known outcome of sexual harassment victimization is the experience of institutional betrayal. Institutional betrayal refers to the negative effects experienced by victims of sexual harassment and assault produced by the perceived failure of the university to intervene properly on the behalf of victims (Rosenthal et al., 2016; Smith & Freyd, 2013). Victims of sexual assault who have also experienced institutional betrayal are more likely to report detrimental effects related to trauma and anxiety than victims who had not experienced institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013).

Contextual Factors Associated with Sexual Harassment

Organizational climate heavily influences the presence of sexual harassment in workplaces (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009). Organizational climate is the shared perceptions of policies, practices, and procedures within an organization and the observed behaviors that are expected and rewarded in the workplace (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). Interrelated to organizational climate, *organizational culture* is the mutually held values,

beliefs, and assumptions shared by organizational members (Zohar & Hofmann, 2012). Organizational culture typically dictates the climate of an organization, and the two constructs are generally reflective of one another (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Higher rates of sexual harassment are reported within workplaces that are perceived to be tolerant of sexual harassment (Welsh, 1999), or where management responses to harassment were viewed as problematic (Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993). The converse is also true, as organizations that enforce anti-harassment policies generally see a reduction in harassment (Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999). For example, the perceived implementation of sexual harassment policies among military personnel was associated with a lower incidence of sexual harassment (Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999). Organizational culture is associated with university sexual harassment (O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998). Specifically, O'Hare and O'Donahue (1998) found that an unprofessional work environment, sexist workplace attitudes, and unfamiliarity with anti-harassment policies and procedures were the highest risk factors of sexual harassment victimization incidences among women university faculty, staff, and students. Within colleges and universities, *perceptions of institutional support* may serve as an appropriate and related measure of organizational climate and institutional betrayal. Institutional support is the perceived support that a university would provide to a victim of sexual aggression, as well as how appropriately the university would discipline a perpetrator of sexual aggression. Like organizational climate, victims of sexual harassment may have low perceptions of institutional support.

Antecedents to Perpetration

Empathy appears to be a characteristic that is diminished among perpetrators of sexual aggression (Lindsey, Carlozzi, & Eells, 2001; Lisak & Ivan, 1995; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Marshall & Moulden, 2001). Empathy is an emotional response towards another person that is reflective of the perceived welfare of that individual (Batson et al., 1995). Empathy is a multifaceted construct that consists of perspective taking, respectful attitudes towards others, personal distress management, emotional responding, and situational factors (Barnett & Mann, 2013). *Perspective taking* is operationalized as the ability to consider another person's point of view through projecting yourself into the place of the person (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Ward et al., 2006). Perspective taking is pertinent to sexual harassment because it accounts for a perpetrator's ability to see the experience through the lens of the victim (Barnett & Mann, 2013).

Sexual assault perpetrators exhibit low levels of victim empathy (Fernandez & Marshall, 2003; Marshall & Mouldon, 2001) and may possess victim-specific empathy deficits rather than general empathy deficits (Marshall, Hudson, Jones, & Fernandez, 1995; Ward et al., 2006). While significant evidence exists pertinent to sexual assault perpetrator empathy deficits, there is less evidence that considers sexual harassment perpetrator empathy and perspective taking deficits. In a study of 117 male undergraduate students, a significant association was found between students who reported a reduced capacity to demonstrate perspective taking and a higher likelihood to perpetrate sexual harassment (Pryor, 1987).

Increased sexual assault victim empathy is associated with a lower likelihood of sexual assault perpetration among men and undergraduate male students (Foubert & Newberry, 2006; Schewe, 2002). Supporting the role of perspective taking in the perpetration of sexual harassment, interventions designed to reduce sexual harassment that focus on increasing perspective taking appear to be effective (Diehl, Glaser, & Bohner, 2014). In their study of 119 college students, Diehl et al. (2014) found that participants who read a sexual harassment experience vignette from the victim's perspective reported a lower likelihood of perpetrating sexual harassment compared to those who read the vignette from the perpetrator's perspective or the neutral text.

Sexual violence prevention interventions may be less effective for past perpetrators and high-risk perpetrators compared to low-risk perpetrators (Malamuth, Huppin, & Linz, 2018; Stephens & George, 2009). A rape prevention intervention administered to undergraduate men resulted in an increase in victim empathy for the total intervention sample, but not for men with a perpetration history (Stephens & George, 2009). Conversely, interventions that incorporate empathy have been found to be effective in improving empathy and sexual aggression attitudes among men with a history of sexual aggression perpetration and a reported high likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault (Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993). These are mixed findings on the effectiveness of empathy in sexual aggression interventions for past perpetrators and individuals with a high-risk of perpetration.

Purpose

Perspective taking and institutional support are important in understanding sexual aggression perpetration (Barnett & Mann, 2013; O'Hare & O'Donahue, 1998). However, much less is known about the role these constructs play in the perpetration of sexual harassment on college campuses. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore empathy deficits by examining discrepancies in reported outcomes of sexual harassment and perceptions of institutional support between victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment on a university campus. Specifically, we aim to answer the following research questions.

1. Is there a discrepancy between perpetrators' and victims' perception of the outcomes of sexual harassment for victims?

2. Is there a discrepancy between perpetrators' and victims' perception of institutional support for victims of sexual harassment?

Method

Procedure

In collaboration with the University of Kentucky (UK) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an online survey was launched at a southeastern university in Spring 2016. Data were collected by UK from three universities across the country as part of a larger study (Multi-College Bystander Efficacy Evaluation, U01CE002668), and data specific to each university were made available to a researcher at that institution. The current project is a secondary analysis of the data from one of those universities. Surveys were distributed and

managed using REDCap, a secure, web-based application (Harris et al., 2009). Survey invitations were sent to all undergraduate students aged 18–24 at the university. Emails and promotional materials indicated that this was a campus climate survey to learn about harassment and violence. Students received survey invitations via email, as well as three reminder emails. Additional recruitment activities included emails solicitations, posters, flyers, and social media posts encouraging participation. Participation was incentivized by entering survey completers into a random drawing raffling off small to medium size prizes, including gift cards to the bookstore. All procedures were approved by the institutional review boards at the two universities (the university where data collection occurred and UK).

Sample

A total of 17,710 students were invited to participate in the online survey, of which 2,248 responded, yielding a 12.6% response rate. Using sexual harassment experiences as a filtering variable (see Measures below), a total of 579 students indicated they were either a victim or perpetrator of sexual harassment in the past year. Individuals were excluded if they reported both perpetrating and being victimized by sexual harassment in the past year (n=104) or neither perpetration or victimization (n=1577). A total of 347 individuals reported being only a victim of sexual harassment while 232 students reported only perpetrating these behaviors. Demographics of the sample are reported in Table 1. A majority of the sample identified as female (64%), White Non-Hispanic (69%), and heterosexual/straight (86%). The median age was 20.8 years old (SD = 1.5) and year in school was nearly evenly distributed.

Measures

Experience with sexual harassment.—Five questions were used to assess for perpetration of sexual harassment and the same five behaviors were asked for the victimization domain. These items were modified from the American Association for Universities (AAU) Campus Climate Survey (Cantor et al., 2015) and the Campus Attitudes Toward Safety Survey (Center for Research on Violence Against Women, 2014). Items included "you made sexual remarks or told jokes or stories that may have been or were insulting or offensive to another student," "you made inappropriate or offensive comments about another student's body or someone else's body appearance or sexual activities," "you emailed, texted, tweeted, phoned, or instant messaged offensive sexual remarks, jokes, stories, pictures, or videos to another student that they probably did not want," "you harassed, insulted, threatened, or intimidated another student because you thought they might be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender," and "you physically hurt another student (including forcing sex) because you thought they might be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender[1]." This scale demonstrates acceptable reliability (Cronbach's α= .77). Students were asked the number of times they committed this behavior since the fall semester (past 7 months) and response options included 0, 1, 2, 3–5, 6–10, more than 10 times, yes but not in time frame, and choose not to answer. If students selected one or more times for any of the

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[1]Because this item relates more to severe homophobic abuse rather than sexual harassment, we considered dropping this single item and using a 4-item version of sexual harassment inventory. However, in examining participant responses, we found that no participant reported perpetrating or being victimized by homophobic abuse solely. Therefore, dropping this item would not change the sample size.

items they were identified to be a perpetrator of sexual harassment. The same question stems were used to assess for sexual harassment victimization. Students were asked how many times since the fall semester a student or someone employed by or otherwise associated with the university committed each act toward them. If students indicated they experienced any of the events one or more time they were coded as being a victim of sexual harassment.

Outcomes.—Students who reported being perpetrators or victims of sexual harassment were asked to indicate the perceived or actual outcomes (respectively) of those events. Specifically, students were asked to indicate (yes/no) whether they thought their victim (for perpetrators) or they (for victims) found that the sexual harassment: interfered with their academic or professional performance; limited their ability to participate in activities or programs at their university; or created an intimidating or uncomfortable environment for student(s). The victim outcomes scale had a Kuder-Richardson 20 score of .63. Six people were missing responses to one item of this summed variable and two victims had missing data for all three consequences. These eight cases were dropped from analyses using this dependent variable. The perpetration outcomes scale had a Kuder-Richardson 20 score of .83. One person was missing one item on this variable. An additional 17 people indicated that they "didn't know" if a consequence occurred as a result of their perpetration. These 18 cases were excluded from analyses that used this dependent variable. These items were modeled after the AAU Campus Climate Survey (Cantor et al., 2015). Frequency of endorsing "yes" were calculated for each item and events were summed to yield a total number of outcomes variable (range 0–3).

Perception of institutional support.—Nine questions were used to assess student's perception of the university's response to sexual misconduct. These items were modified from the AAU Campus Climate Survey (Cantor et al., 2015). Items aimed to assess both perceived fairness of the institutional response and perception of tolerance for sexual misconduct. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very Unlikely (1) to Very Likely (5). Examples of items that represented perceived institutional support included: "[University name] would provide accommodations to support the person making the report. For example, make changes in academic schedules, housing or other safety accommodations"; "[University name] would take action to address factors that may have led to the sexual misconduct"; "[University name] would support the person making the report." Higher scores indicate higher perception that the institution would respond to an accusation of sexual misconduct in a fair and just manner for victims. Four items were reverse scored, then items were averaged to create one scale score ranging from 1 to 5. This scale demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$). Twenty individuals were missing data on all items and one individual was missing responses on seven items; these 21 individuals were dropped from analyses using this variable. Twelve individuals were missing responses on one item, and the mean score was calculated using a denominator of eight for these individuals.

Analytic Plan

To answer the first research question, two analytic techniques were used. First, a Poisson regression tested whether the victim/perpetrator status predicted the count of outcomes.

Poisson regressions are used to model distributions when the dependent variable is a count variable (Agresti, 2013). Poisson regressions assume independence and that the distributions of counts follow a Poisson distribution. Second, a chi-square test of independence was used to see if the number of outcomes was dependent on victim/perpetrator status. To answer the second research question, an independent samples t-test was used to test whether the average institutional support score was significantly different between victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment. A standard p-value threshold of .05 was used for all analyses.

Results

Descriptives

Victims.—Victims reported experiencing a mean of 1.09 out of three measured outcomes (SD = 1.01). Among victims of sexual harassment, 72% reported experiencing at least one negative outcome of this victimization (see Table 2). The most commonly reported outcome for victims was feeling that the sexual harassment created an intimidating or uncomfortable environment (63%) (see Table 3). Victims of sexual harassment had an average mean score of 3.25 (SD = 0.74) on the Institutional Support Scale.

Perpetrators.—Perpetrators perceived their actions as causing a mean of 0.22 negative outcomes (SD=.66) for victims. Only 8.5% of perpetrators of sexual harassment believed their victim(s) experienced one or more negative outcome (see Table 2). The most common perceived outcome was believing that the sexual harassment created an intimidating or uncomfortable environment for the victim (1.5% of perpetrators reported this; see Table 3). Perpetrators of sexual harassment reported an average total score of 3.52 (SD=0.57) on the Institutional Support Scale.

Research Questions

Question 1.—Results from the Poisson regression indicate that victim/perpetrator status significantly predicted the count of outcomes (χ^2 (1, N= 579) = 213.43, p<.001). The ratio of the variance (1.04) to the mean (0.81) was 1.29, indicating there was minimal overdispersion and that a Poisson regression was an appropriate test. Additionally, the value to degrees of freedom ratio was 1.4, indicating minimal overdispersion. Perpetrator versus victim status was a significant predictor based on the Wald-Chi Square test results (χ^2 (1, N=579) =127.06, p<.001). The likelihood of reporting outcomes was 6.9 times greater for victims compared to perpetrators of sexual harassment (95% CI: 4.9, 9.7).

Results from the chi-square test of independence revealed that number of outcomes was dependent on victim/perpetrator status (χ^2 (3, N= 553) = 213.65, p<.001). As can be seen in Table 2, victims reported significantly more outcomes than perpetrators. For example, 91.5% of perpetrators believed their victim experienced zero outcomes as a result of sexual harassment, whereas only 27.9% of victims reported experiencing zero outcomes as a result of being sexually harassed. That is to say, 72.1% of victims reported at least one negative outcome as a result of sexual harassment, while only 8.5% of perpetrators of sexual harassment believed that their victim(s) experienced a negative outcome.

Question 2.—Independent samples t-tests indicated that the differences between perpetrator scores and victim scores of institutional support were significant (t (548) = −4.9, p<.001, 95% CI: −0.38, −0.16). This indicates that victims of sexual harassment reported a lower level of perception of institutional support (3.25) than perpetrators (3.52).

Discussion

These findings answered two important research questions about sexual harassment. In response to the first research question, there is a large discrepancy between perpetrator's perceived outcomes and victim's reported actual outcomes of sexual harassment behaviors. Perpetrators of sexual harassment perceived their actions had far fewer outcomes than victims of these behaviors reported. This provides evidence that perpetrators of sexual harassment have deficits in perspective taking, a key component of empathy. Past studies of perspective taking included direct measures of perspective taking deficits among perpetrators of sexual assault, not sexual harassment (Fernandez & Marshall, 2003; Marshall & Moulden, 2001). Prior to the current study, perspective taking research related to sexual harassment was primarily focused on its association with influencing a person's likelihood to sexually harass (Pryor, 1987). By measuring the perceived outcomes of harassment among actual perpetrators, this study has established a record of perspective taking deficits within sexual harassment perpetrators. This finding lends support for the use of perspective taking interventions to reduce the perpetration of sexual harassment among college students (Diehl et al., 2014).

Results from the second research question indicated that victims of sexual harassment perceived lower levels of institutional support than perpetrators of sexual harassment. Research among college students indicates that victims of sexual harassment experience institutional betrayal after an experience of victimization (Rosenthal et al., 2016), and research within workplaces suggests that victims of sexual harassment report that their organization culture/climate is permissive of sexual harassment (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). In the case of college students, victims of sexual harassment reported lower perceptions of institutional support than perpetrators of sexual harassment. This could be because they, like their counterparts in the workplace, are perceiving permissive environments. Alternatively, they could be feeling betrayed by the institution, thus perceiving lower levels of institutional support. Further research is needed to disentangle this association.

Implications

Perspective taking interventions.—The high frequency of sexual harassment perpetrators who did not believe their perpetration induced negative outcomes among their victims suggests a reduced capacity of perpetrators to exhibit empathy for victims who they sexually harassed. While empathy has been widely incorporated in sexual aggression prevention programs (McGrath, Cumming, Burchard, Zeoli, & Ellerby, 2010), empirical studies have revealed mixed results on the effectiveness of sexual aggression perpetrator intervention programs that utilize empathy as a central component of intervention programing content (Mann & Barnett, 2013). Studies that measure empathy interventions as

a form of sexual violence prevention are limited by study design issues and insufficient operationalizations of empathy (Day, Casey, & Gerace, 2010). While victim empathy interventions have produced positive cognitive changes in studies, their effectiveness in reducing sexual violence recidivism are unclear and relatively untested (Mann & Barnett, 2013). However, perspective taking deficits may be associated with other cognitive conditions (Ward et al., 2006). For example, perspective taking deficits are not a driver of perpetrators who view victim harm positively (Ward et al., 2006). In such cases, the lack of victim empathy is likely related to other antecedents of perpetration (Ward et al., 2006), which demonstrates the need to use empathy interventions as a component of multi-faceted violence prevention strategies.

Targeting perspective taking empathy has been successful in reducing sexual harassment myth acceptance among college students (Diehl et al., 2014). While the effectiveness of empathy as a central construct in perpetrator intervention is mixed, the high prevalence of perspective taking empathy deficits among perpetrators demonstrates the need for the utilization of perspective taking content into prevention efforts. Intervention efforts should continue to incorporate perspective taking empathy into programs and evaluate its effectiveness. Mann and Barnett (2013) suggest that interventions built on fostering empathy do not go far enough, and this research demonstrates that perpetrators lack a key component of empathy -- perspective taking -- which can be more precisely targeted. Researchers and university officials should consider innovative intervention efforts that supplement empathy with the critical component of perspective taking.

Empathy and perspective taking are some of the many antecedents of sexual assault and harassment perpetration. Cooper, Paluck, and Fletcher (2013) recommend that programs address a specific aspect of violence to intervene and consider the influence of individual, societal, and situational factors. Sexual harassment prevention efforts should utilize a broad range of interconnected strategies that can address individual characteristics (McDonald, Charlesworth, & Graham, 2015; Ward et al., 2006). Within this framework, empathy and perspective taking interventions should be developed in conjunction with other intervention modalities and used when perpetrators possess victim-specific empathy deficits.

Social marketing campaigns.—In addition to incorporating perspective taking into perpetrator intervention programs, knowledge about outcomes can also be integrated into prevention programs by way of social marketing campaigns. Specifically, institutions and prevention programs can augment knowledge and awareness campaigns by advertising information about the real outcomes of sexual harassment for victims. The social norms approach in sexual violence prevention aims to cultivate environments that do not condone sexual violence (Berkowitz, 2010). Social norms are a significant driver of sexual aggression (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007), and universities should reinforce prosocial norms that discourage sexual aggression among past perpetrators (Gidycz, et al., 2011). The potential effects of this approach are two-fold; first, it may prevent a perpetrator from engaging in sexual harassment by increasing their empathy/perspective taking and reinforcing the institution's anti-harassment culture. Second, it can inform bystanders of the harmful outcomes of sexual harassment, potentially encouraging them to intervene to prevent sexual harassment. Using social media marketing campaigns to increase knowledge of the impacts

of sexual harassment might dispel the notion that sexual harassment perpetration does not induce negative outcomes among victims. University specific social campaigns may be impactful in increasing prosocial norms because they are broadcasted to participants residing in the same community (Gidycz et al., 2011).

Institutional support.—The low level of institutional support perceived by sexual harassment victims calls for an institutional response. Universities could borrow from progress made within workplaces to revamp policies and cultures to be intolerant of sexual harassment. For example, a novel organizational framework for combatting sexual harassment involves the implementation of prevention strategies based on their organizational functioning and timing (McDonald et al., 2015). McDonald et al. (2015) operationalize organizational prevention functions into the three classifications: messages (how sexual harassment is defined and communicated in the organization), management (how leaders work to foster prevention and intervention efforts), and monitoring (efforts by the organization to evaluate internal standards and risk factors of sexual harassment). Prevention strategies are organized sequentially into the categories: primary prevention strategies (efforts aimed to deter harassment), secondary interventions (immediate responses to incidence of harassment), and tertiary responses (long-term responses after the occurrence of sexual harassment). By using this model as a framework, universities can develop more effective responses to sexual harassment across a variety of functional platforms at the prevention and intervention time points.

Cultivating a culture that opposes sexual harassment requires actively communicating policy expectations and increasing awareness to promote an anti-harassment culture (Maass, Cadinu, & Galdi, 2013). The use of social marketing campaigns designed to generate awareness and disseminate factual information pertaining to sexual harassment victimization could aid this effort, as universities can advertise that they do not tolerate sexual harassment. This public endeavor would bolster students, and particularly victims', beliefs that the institution would respond in fair and just ways to claims of sexual misconduct.

Second, to mitigate potential institutional betrayal, universities can support victims by taking an active role in generating public awareness of sexual harassment victimization (Coker et al., 2017), increasing (and improving) support services for victims (Hill & Silva, 2005), and providing transparency with the reporting process (Smith & Freyd, 2014). As part of this, universities could consider engaging in iterative investigation into whether they are handling claims of sexual misconduct in fair and just ways. This can include the expansion of student support services and increasing overall transparency about the school's processes in the event of a victimization experience. Universities could expand the extent of sexual harassment support services from a prevention and victim-support perspective. Additionally, universities could consider implementing enhanced victim support services, such as anonymous digital reporting mechanisms, to increase the number of platforms that students can seek services from. Over half of college students endorse the usage of a confidential web-reporting system for sexual harassment by their university (Hill & Silva, 2005). Future research should explore the efficacy of currently used and alternative victim support services to promote resources that have been empirically tested and validated.

Limitations

This study's classification as a cross-sectional study inhibits our ability to substantiate causation between the predictor and outcome variables. Due to lack of temporal ordering, we cannot know whether levels of institutional support were different before being victimized by or perpetrating sexual harassment. For example, we cannot distinguish whether perpetrators chose to perpetrate because they knew the university would not take action against them, or whether being a victim of sexual harassment may have reduced the perceptions of institutional support. Alternatively, an entirely different process may be accounting for differences in institutional support scores that is not captured by these measures and research design. The lack of moderating and mediating variables in this study limits the understanding of explanatory mechanisms that influence the relationship between perpetrator/victim status and institutional support.

The results from the self-reported harassment scale should be interpreted with caution because of the possibility that perpetrators may not view their actions as harmful, which would reduce their likelihood of endorsing the items in the measure. The negative wording of the self-reported harassment scale may also result in an underreporting of perceived harassment outcomes among perpetrators. Additionally, the list of potential outcomes related to sexual harassment did not include items such as poor mental or physical health, missing important components of the harassment experience.

The measures used limit the study's generalizability. The use of well-established psychometrically sound measures would have improved this study's generalizability (e.g., the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire [Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995]). To better capture sexual harassment based on real or perceived sexual identity, the measure included one item that assessed sexual harassment and one item that measured more severe forms of victimization (i.e., assault). The inclusion of the assault item limits the validity of the measure as a sexual harassment indicator.

Future Research Directions

The results in this study present novel findings that should be supplemented with additional research that assesses perspective taking deficits in perpetrators and perceptions of institutional support among college students. Future study designs should incorporate more direct measures of empathy to garner a clear path between empathy, perspective taking, and sexual harassment perpetration. Additionally, future research could explore how individual items within the Institutional Support Scale perform between perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment. Experimental studies that test the constructs of empathy, perspective taking, and institutional support would substantially contribute to the field's understanding of how these constructs interact in a controlled setting. Past research termed the "Computer Harassment Paradigm" has successfully studied sexual harassment perpetration in experimental conditions by using computers to assess harassment behavior levied towards virtual victims (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003). Using experimental study designs offers the opportunity to advance the understanding of perspective taking and institutional support as antecedents of sexual harassment perpetration. Future studies should consider the sexual victimization experiences of LGBTQ individuals. Additionally,

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researchers should measure perspective taking deficits and perceptions of institutional support in high-risk university students to add to the knowledge base of interventions for high-risk perpetrators and past perpetrators.

Conclusions

Findings from this study indicate that perpetrators of sexual harassment underestimate the number of negative outcomes their behaviors create for victims. Additionally, victims perceive the institution to be less fair and just in response to claims of sexual misconduct than perpetrators. These findings can be used to improve the effectiveness of intervention programs, bolstering support for emphasizing the role of perspective taking. In addition, universities can leverage progress made within workplaces to promote a healthy institutional climate that does not tolerate sexual harassment, which may lead to reductions in the rates of sexual harassment.

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Table 1

Demographic Statistics

Characteristic	Full Sample % (n)	Victims Only (n=346) % (n)	Perpetrators Only (n=232) % (n)
Victim	61.7 (347)		
Perpetrator	40.1 (232)		
Gender			
Female	64.0 (370)	81.5 (282)	37.9 (88)
Male	34.3 (198)	16.5 (57)	60.8 (141)
Other	1.7 (10)	2.0 (7)	1.3 (3)
Missing	1	1	0
Race			
White Not Hispanic	69.3 (400)	68.2 (236)	71.0 (164)
Black Not Hispanic	11.6 (67)	10.7 (37)	13.0 (30)
Hispanic	8.0 (46)	9.0 (31)	6.5 (15)
Other	11.1 (64)	12.1 (42)	9.5 (22)
Missing	2	1	1
Educational Year			
Freshman	21.9 (126)	20.2 (70)	24.5 (56)
Sophomore	23.1 (133)	19.6 (68)	28.4 (65)
Junior	26.0 (150)	29.1 (101)	21.4 (49)
Senior	29.0 (167)	31.1 (108)	25.8 (59)
Missing	3	0	3
Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual	85.5 (495)	82.1 (285)	90.9 (210)
Bisexual	6.7 (39)	6.9 (24)	6.5 (15)
Gay/Lesbian	3.1 (18)	4.3 (15)	1.3 (3)
Asexual	2.2 (13)	3.5 (12)	0.4 (1)
Questioning	1.4 (8)	2.0 (7)	0.4 (1)
Not Listed	.9 (5)	1.2 (4)	0.4 (1)
Missing	1	0	1

Table 2

Perpetrator and Victim Consequence Rates

Number of Consequences	% reported by Perpetrators	% reported by Victims
0	91.5	27.9
1	3.3	40.0
2	1.4	15.9
3	3.8	16.2

Difference in rates between perpetrators and victims are statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square Value = 213.65, df=3, p<.001)

Table 3

Rates for Specific Consequence Items

Consequence Items	% reported by Perpetrators	% reported by Victims
Interfered with their academic or professional performance	1.0	23.7
Limited their ability to participate in activities or programs at university	0.7	22.0
Created an intimidating or uncomfortable environment for them	1.5	63.1