

Women's Perceptions of Social-Sexual Behavior: A Cross-Cultural Replication

TAMA O MATSUI

Department of Law, Surugadai University, Saitama, Japan

TAKASHI KAKUYAMA

Department of Human Relations, Tokyo International University, Saitama, Japan

MARY-LOU ONGLATCO

Japan Desk of Information Today, Manila, the Philippines

AND

MARTIN OGUTU

Department of Business Administration, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Japanese female undergraduates ($N = 258$) read a vignette depicting social-sexual behavior toward a woman at work and indicated their perceptions of the incident, the coping responses expected from the target, and their own sex-role attitudes and social self-esteem. Three contextual variables (actor status, actor-target familiarity, and the sexuality of body touching) were manipulated in the vignette. Hierarchical multiple regressions indicated that women having liberal sex-role attitudes perceived the behavior to be more inappropriate and expected more assertive coping responses of the target than women having conservative sex-role attitudes, and that women having low social self-esteem perceived the behavior to be more sexually intimidating than women having high social self-esteem. Only the sexuality of body touching influenced the women's perceptions.

This study was supported by Tokyo International University and Surugadai University. The authors extend appreciation to Hiroshi Konishi, Shin-Ichi Tsukamoto, and Masato Uchida for their help in data-gathering and to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The fourth author was at the Graduate School of Economics, Soka University, Hachioji, Japan, when this research was conducted. Reprint requests should be addressed to Tamao Matsui, Department of Law, Surugadai University, Hanno, Saitama 357, Japan.

Similarities and differences in the perceptions of Japanese and American women are discussed. © 1995 Academic Press, Inc.

Sexual harassment of women at work is an issue of concern in many countries. However, the existing literature consists almost entirely of research conducted in the United States, and it is unclear whether those results are generalizable to other countries. Research in different cultural contexts is needed to establish a full understanding of this phenomenon. Using Japanese female undergraduates as subjects, this study explores the impact of personal and contextual variables on women's perceptions of social-sexual behavior in a work setting. The social-sexual behaviors examined in this study consist of situations in which actors (in positions which vary in degree of power) make unwanted advances (which vary in degree of sexuality) toward the victim (e.g., Coles, 1986; Farley, 1978; Gutek & Morasch, 1982).

The personal variables explored in this study are women's sex-role attitudes and social self-esteem. Many studies (e.g., Brooks & Perot, 1991; Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1992; Pryor & Day, 1984; Schneider, 1982) in the United States have indicated that women's sex-role attitudes influence their perceptions of social-sexual behavior. For example, Brooks and Perot (1991) found that women high in feminist ideology perceived sexual harassment as more offensive than women low in feminist ideology. Sex-role attitudes are relevant to the perceptions of social-sexual behavior for Japanese women as well. In Japanese society, women are expected, traditionally, to be subservient to men. Based on Confucian norms, women have never been viewed as the equals of men. Translating these Confucian norms to social-sexual behavior, the "normal" response expected from women is a passive response or giving in.

In addition, the collective is given priority over the individual in Japanese society. Assertion of one's individual rights is the exception rather than the norm, because assertion of one's rights is viewed as highly individualistic. Confucian norms have been subject to change with the increased educational levels of women and men, but their influence remains quite strong. This situation was reflected in the finding that non-Japanese women working in Japan described "nonassertion of their own rights" and "high tolerance of unequal treatment in working conditions by the company" as behaviors of their Japanese woman colleagues that they found incomprehensible (Dowa Fire and Marine Insurance Co., Ltd., 1990).

While Japanese university women are expected to have developed more liberal attitudes, it is reasonable to expect that individual differences in this regard will influence their perceptions of what is appropriate and inappropriate social-sexual behavior. The more liberal a woman's attitudes, and the more assertive she is, the greater the likelihood that she

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