

The Automatic Activation of Sexually Harassing Beliefs: Past Experiences and Traits of Power

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ABSTRACT

Social psychologists have shown that power is able to prime individuals to sexually harass. In an extension of this work, the current studies utilized two different priming techniques: mindful priming (study 1) and subliminal (study 2) to provide a clearer picture of how power influences sexually harassing behavior. Study 1 found that recalling a past experience of positive power discrepancy increased one's Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH). Study 2 found that priming traits of being powerful led to a higher LSH than when primed with being powerless. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Introduction

Over the past 30 years one of the most prevalently studied areas in social and organizational psychology has been sexual harassment. These studies have focused on two major areas of research, the outcomes and antecedents of sexual harassment. The latter of these two areas, antecedents of sexual harassment, specifically power, are the focus of the current study. Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, and Strack (1995) utilized priming, “the incidental activation of knowledge structures, such as trait concepts and stereotypes, by the current situational context (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996: 230)”, of power to influence men’s likelihood to sexually harass a confederate. While the authors were able to show how priming of power was able to increase men’s proclivity to sexually harass another, there is still much to be learned. If power is able to activate this proclivity, then a valid question becomes, to what extent does being exposed to power discrepancies increase this proclivity? Specifically, does one’s past experiences of being exposed to positive power discrepancy (when one has power over another) have a higher proclivity to sexually harass than those in a negative power discrepancy (when another has power over that individual)? As such, the purpose of the current study is to assess to what extent does being exposed to power in the past (measured through a mindful priming task) influence one’s proclivity to sexually harass. Furthermore, to rule out the potential of detection of the priming, and to provide diagnose the ability of traits of power to influence one’s proclivity to sexually harass, a second study was conducted via a subliminal priming procedure. It is expected that those individuals exposed to power, either by recall (study 1) or prime traits (study 2) to be more likely to sexually harass than those individuals exposed to a situation (study 1) or traits (study 2) of being powerless. To provide context and rationale for these hypotheses, the article will proceed as follows. First it will discuss an overview of the sexual harassment literature with particular emphasis on the antecedents. Next a brief discussion of the priming and nonconscious

processes literature, followed by a more in-depth discussion on the application of priming and nonconscious processes influence on sexually harassing behaviors.

Theory & Hypothesis Development

Automaticity/Nonconscious Processes

The origin of automaticity, or the study of automatic processing by the mind, can be traced to the Freudian concept of hidden, motivated influences of thought and William James' concept of habit (Wegner & Bargh, 1998). The Freudian concept, now called preconscious processing, "focused on the initial perceptual analysis of the environment that occurred prior to conscious awareness and participation in the processing" (Wegner & Bargh, 1998: 460). On the other hand, William James' concept of habitualization posited that behavior could be ingrained into the mind through chronic repetition, thus making the performance of subsequent behaviors relatively effortless.

Early studies discovered attributes of these processes: (a) fitting a dual process model (conscious and nonconscious), (b) chronically activated concepts are processed more quickly, (c) chronic exposure to a stimulus facilitates stimulus detection (i.e. makes it quicker), (d) nonconscious processes do not require the intention of the individual and can occur below the level of conscious control, and (e) when given adequate processing time, conscious thought can override nonconscious processing (e.g., Neely, 1976, 1977; Posner & Snyder, 1975; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). In regards to the latter point, research has since shown that nonconscious processes can also override conscious processing (Bargh, 1989). Furthermore, research in the last quarter century has found that nonconscious influences are not restricted to internal thoughts, as originally thought, but can also be influenced by the actions of others (coined the perception-behavior link) (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996) and studies have garnered strong support for this association (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Chartrand and Bargh, 1999; Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998).

Research dating back to the suppositions of William James has focused on the ability of the mind to be influenced by chronic exposure to relevant stimuli, whether internal or external to the individual's mind (see James, 1890). James posited that the thought of an action or behavior would increase the likelihood of one to perform that behavior, thus the more one thought of an action, the more likely they will behave. Berkowitz (1984) used this logic to discuss how the increased proclivity of viewers to be aggressive, due to the violent cues they perceive in the mass media, would spread throughout one's memory and activate similarly violent memories. Furthermore, the more images the individual was exposed to, the more likely they would behave that way. This automatic processing can run independently of one's conscious processing capabilities once activated and can operate highly efficiently because it uses minimal attentional resources. These processes vary by the degree in which they derive goal dependency, resulting in some processes that are fueled by the environment.

Because of the influence of nonconscious processing to occur outside of one's awareness or intent, and its potential for influencing one's behavior in the workplace, it is important to study its effects in the workplace. However, little to no research is currently available on how these processes influence organizational behavior; as such it is important to draw upon more basic research on priming and nonconscious processing in general. First, the literature shows that nonconscious thought can influence behaviors without the knowledge of individuals (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Bargh, 1989; Bargh et al., 1996; Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Niendenthal, 1990; Shah, 2003), thus suggesting that situational and organizational stimuli may influence an individuals' perceptions and actions outside of awareness and control. Furthermore, these nonconscious processes have been shown to impact a myriad of outcomes including goals (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Chartrand & Bargh, 1996; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Gillath, Mikulincer, Fitzsimons, Shaver, Schachner, & Bargh, 2006; Shah, 2003), affect and emotions (Bargh, 1989; Bargh et al., 1996; Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Niendenthal, 1990), intelligence (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998), stereotyping (Bargh et al., 1996; Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998), nonverbal behavior (Bargh et al. 1996), and social interaction (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Bargh et al., 1996; Bargh & Ferguson, 2000) thus signifying a strong need for study.

Studies focusing on how priming may influence concepts that are relevant to organizational issues have generally focused on trait concepts in order to activate specific stereotypes of different groups. Priming of these traits resulted in increased helping behavior (Aarts, Chartrand, Custers, Danner, Jefferis, & Cheng, 2005), accelerated performance speed to ensure completion of a goal-relevant task (Aarts et al, 2005), assimilation of a specific ethnicity to public policy issues, i.e. activation of stereotypic behaviors (Abraham & Appiah, 2006), social dominance (Huang & Liu, 2005), increased perception of humanity of in-group (Vaes, Paladino, & Leyens, 2006), inhumanization (Delgado, Rodriguez-Perez, Vaes, Leyens, & Betancor, 2009), affective reactions (Weisbuch & Ambady, 2008), implicit attitudes toward specific ethnicity (Bohner, Siebler, Gonzalez, Haye, & Schmidt, 2008), assimilation of group attitudes (Ledgerwood & Chaiken, 2007), judgment of favorability of Blacks (Rudman & Lee, 2002), attachment toward one's social group (Brannen, 2007), and loyalty, in-group favoritism, and expression of in-group identification (Hertel & Kerr, 2001).

From these studies, it has been shown that stimuli that are activated nonconsciously have influence over a wide range of perceptions, judgments, cognitions, and behaviors. Although the bulk of these studies were laboratory experiments, given the large number of influences documented, as well as the rather fundamental nature of these processes, it seems eminently reasonable to posit that nonconscious processing is also likely to play an important role in a wide range of organizationally-relevant judgments and behaviors. As such, organizational behavior scholars can be duly informed by studying traditional organizational behaviors (such as sexual harassment) through the utilization of priming techniques.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is one of the most harmful and impacting forms of counterproductive behaviors in the workplace. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2007) defines it as "Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct

of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment (1).” Informally, or perhaps prototypically, it is thought of as an unwelcome physical or verbal act made by an aggressor (man) against a target (woman) that interferes with the target’s work.

Research on sexual harassment can be categorized into two main areas based on the focus of the studies: 1) outcomes of sexual harassment and 2) antecedents of sexual harassment. Only a brief discussion on the outcomes of sexual harassment will be mentioned here as the crux of this paper is on the antecedents of sexual harassment.

Outcomes. The sexual harassment literature is rife with examples of the different reactions one may have to sexual harassment (Baker, Terpstra, & Larntz, 1990; Bronner, Peretz, & Ehrenfeld, 2003; Grauerholz, 1989; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Hand & Sanchez, 2000; Jones & Remland, 1992; Knapp, Faley, & Dubois, 1997; Pryor, 1995; Sczesny & Stahlberg, 2000; Terpstra & Baker, 1989). These behaviors may be assertive (Baker et al., 1990), physically retaliate (Reilly et al., 1986; Terpstra & Baker, 1989), leave the field (Terpstra & Baker, 1989), comply (Jones & Remland, 1992; O’Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000; Reilly et al., 1986), and yell (Reilly et al., 1986). If the targets of sexual harassment comply (generally unwillingly) they may experience a host of psychological issues such as a sense of helplessness (Klein & Seligman, 1976), decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Norton, 2002; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982), withdrawal from the job (Norton, 2002), increased anxiety and depression (Klein & Seligman, 1976; Norton, 2002), and higher levels of stress (Norton, 2002). Because of these myriad of negative reactions to being sexually harassed, it is important for scholars to uncover what leads someone to sexually harass. As such the focus of the rest of the paper is on the antecedents that lead to an increased proclivity to sexually harass.

Antecedents. Research has studied many potential antecedents of sexual harassment including the Big Five personality (Pryor & Meyers, 2000; Lee, Gizzarone, & Ashton, 2003), the perception of role incongruity (Berdahl, 2007; Dall’Ara & Maass, 1999), and the presence of power (Bargh et al., 1995; Pryor, 1987; Pryor et al., 1993). A growing body of research within the literature has focused on the personal and situational factors leading to the reactions exhibited by the targets of sexually harassing behavior (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998; Baker et al., 1990; Bourgeois & Perkins, 2003; Bronner et al., 2003; DeSouza, Pryor, & Hutz, 1998; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Jones & Remland, 1992; Knapp et al., 1997; Pryor, 1995; Ragins & Scandura, 1995; Sigal, Gibbs, Goodrich, Rashid, Anjum, Hsu, Perrino, Boratay, Carson-Arenas, van Baarsen, van der Pligt, & Pan, 2005; Terpstra & Baker, 1989; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989; Welsh, 1999).

Of importance to the current research is how the situation is conducive to, or promotes, such behavior. Specifically, how the presence of power is able to prime an individual to sexually harass, with particular emphasis on how this is influenced by past exposure to power. The priming of power has been previously shown to influence one’s likelihood to sexually harass (Bargh et al., 1995) but an initiator’s behavior tends to decrease in severity once they have been disciplined (Lucero, Allen, & Middleton, 2006) as being disciplined strips away the initiator’s perception of having a positive power discrepancy over others. Bargh et al (1995) demonstrated an automatic link between power and sex for men with a high proclivity to sexually harass. The

automatic link hypothesis supported by the authors was also supported by Bargh and Raymond (1995) such that priming men with a high proclivity to sexually harass also increased those men's perceptions of the attractiveness of a female confederate, thus making them more willing to sexually harass her. Furthermore, Mussweiler and Forster (2000) demonstrated an automatic link between sex and aggression such that those individuals exposed to sex priming words demonstrated more aggressive behavior. Combined these studies illustrate that the presentation of power in the workplace, especially over a target that is the opposite gender, can increase one's proclivity to sexually harass.

Thus, if the presence of a habitual stimuli is able to increase the likelihood of that stimuli activating a behavior (James, 1890), and the concept of power has been shown to increase one's likelihood to sexually harass (Bargh et al., 1995), then it seems logical that the presence of power (or traits of it) could increase one's likelihood of sexually harassing another. Furthermore, to the extent that an individual has been exposed to a positive power discrepancy in the past, the recall of such an experience should similarly serve as activation for the hypothesized power → sex link resulting in an increased proclivity to sexually harass. On the other hand, those individuals recalling a situation in which they were involved in a negative power discrepancy should be less likely to sexually harass. Based on this logic, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Those individuals in the positive power discrepancy condition will have a higher Likelihood to Sexually Harass score than those individuals in a negative power discrepancy condition.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants. Upper level undergraduate business students (N=40) participated in exchange for extra credit in which 25 were male and 15 were female with a mean age of 23.10 years. 25 participants (62.5%) were currently employed, and 16 (40.0%) had previous managerial experience. Two respondents data was eliminated from the analysis due to incomplete data.

Materials. Since individuals were asked to recall a time in which they either had (or someone else had) power, authority, or control over another, it is highly possible that these individuals could be susceptible to mood induction (in other words, they recall a positive or negative experience thus the priming activates a mood, not an actual increase or decrease proclivity to sexually harass); as such the PANAS mood scale (see Appendix A) was utilized to rule this alternative explanation out. The PANAS mood scale is commonly used in psychological research, especially by priming researchers to ensure that it is in fact the priming manipulation leading to the derivation in results, not a mood induction (see Smith & Bargh, 2008). It has been shown to generate consistently high internal consistencies ranging from .84 to .90 (e.g. Crawford & Henry, 2004; Watson, Clark, Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS scale consists of two, ten item scales with one measuring positive affect (e.g. attentive, interested, alert, excited, enthusiastic,

inspired, proud, determined, strong, and active) and the other measuring negative affect (distressed, upset, hostile, irritable, scared, afraid, ashamed, guilty, and nervous).

The dependent variable for this study was the Pryor (1987) Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale (see Pryor, 1987). Prior research on the scale (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995; Pryor & Meyers, 2000) have consistently generated alphas ranging above .90, .92 in the current study, thus suggesting excellent internal consistency. The 30 item scenario based survey provides the reader with 10 different scenarios in which sexual harassment is present (e.g. such as to what extent would you consider hiring a news anchor in exchange for sexual favors).

Procedure. Participants took part in the experiment one at a time. When they arrived outside of the conference room (testing room) they were met by the experimenter who accompanied them into the room and explained the procedure. They were then informed that the experiment consisted of a series of unrelated tasks. The first task assessed affect (i.e. the PANAS Mood Scale). The second task, a mindful priming technique (see Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998), analyzed the individual's ability to successfully recall as much specific detail about a prior experience in which the individual participated in an activity in which power, authority, and control were present. The third task assessed the individual's perceptions of social interaction. The exact nature or topic of the questionnaire was not disclosed in order to not elicit any biases during the priming procedure. In other words, to ensure the priming was the true antecedent of any derivation in proclivity to sexually harass across conditions and not an individual's preconceived notions or perceptions of sexual harassment. Finally, the fourth task was to once again take the PANAS mood scale in order to assess for mood induction derived from the priming manipulation.

At this point, participants were then asked if they wished to proceed with the study, filled out the consent form, and filled out demographic data (see Appendix B). Next the experimenter handed the individuals a notepad and asked them to describe as richly and in as much detail as possible an experience in which they had either had power, authority, or control over another (positive power discrepancy condition) or when someone else had power, authority, or control over them (negative power discrepancy condition) . After five minutes had elapsed, the experimenter re-entered the room, collected the materials, and handed the participant the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale (the PANAS scale was attached on the last page of the scenarios) and were told upon completion to bring the materials to the experimenter's office.

Upon completion of the questionnaire the participants underwent the funneled debriefing procedure recommended by Bargh and colleagues (see Bargh & Chartrand, 2000; Bargh et al, 2001; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996) and as administered in past studies (e.g. Authors, 2010; Author, 2010). After this, the hypothesis and purpose of the study was fully explained, all questions or comments were addressed, and they were thanked for their participation in the study.

Results

Manipulation. The PANAS mood scales were assessed via within-subjects T tests to assess whether or not mood induction was serving as a mediating variable. The results from the T-tests indicated no significant difference between the scales (PA: $t=.091$, *n.s.* & NA: $t= 1.9$,

n.s.), thus implying that there was no mood induction and any differences between conditions are likely to be a result of the priming conditions.

The means of the scales generated by the respondents were analyzed via an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the independent variable (condition level) and gender as a control. Gender of participant was included as a control because of the obvious distinction in perceptions of, or exhibition of, sexually harassing behaviors.

To test Hypothesis 1, we analyzed the means of the scales via a between-subjects analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). There was a significant main effect for Condition, $F(1, 35) = 4.53$, $p < .05$ such that those individuals in the Power recall condition had a significantly higher proclivity to sexually harass ($M = 1.57$), than those in the Powerless condition ($M = 1.06$). Furthermore, gender was marginally significant, $F(1, 35) = 3.59$, $p < .10$. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Discussion

As predicted, having participants recall a situation in which they either had a positive power discrepancy or a negative power discrepancy significantly influenced their likelihood to sexually harass. In support of the power → sex hypothesis of Bargh et al (1995) and in extension, priming individuals by thinking about past experiences in which they were exposed to power was capable of influencing their likelihood to sexually harass. As expected we found that those individuals who recalled a time when they had a positive power discrepancy over another had a significantly higher proclivity to sexually harass another than those recalling a time in which they had a negative power discrepancy. This is of particular importance because it may imply that those individuals exposed to power early on in life may be more likely to sexually harass later in life, thus potentially providing an explanation for the different perceptions of sexual harassment by men and women. Even though societies perception of women in the workplace has been changing over the last 40 years with a higher degree of acceptance for women in power, women today are still not as exposed to being in a positive power discrepancy as they grow up, thus providing them with fewer experiences to be activated when presented with power related stimuli. Although the findings provide strong initial support for the ability of mindful priming to alter one's proclivity for sexually harassing another, a possible critique of the current study is that the individuals could have been aware of the intent of the study. In other words, subjects may have exhibited demand characteristics as they realized what the researcher was measuring, and answered in a similar manner to the condition they were in (e.g. power recall leading to being more like to sexually harassing). As such, a second study was designed to assess the impact of the traits of a positive or negative power discrepancy to influence an individual's proclivity to sexually harass outside of their awareness (i.e. subliminally). As such, we conducted the following study with the same logic and expectation as study 1, such that:

Hypothesis 2: Those individuals primed with traits of a positive power discrepancy condition will have a higher Likelihood to Sexually Harass score than those primed with traits of a negative power discrepancy condition.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants. Upper level undergraduate business students (N=37) participated in exchange for extra credit in which 21 were male and 16 were female with a mean age of 22.05 years. 25 participants (67.5%) were currently employed, and 16 (43.2%) had previous managerial experience.

Materials. The same materials from study 1 were also used in the current study. The Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale once again had excellent internal consistency, $\alpha = .94$.

Visual Acuity Test. The priming manipulation for the current study followed the use of a visual acuity task (adopted from Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982, and Chartrand & Bargh, 1996) which is a parafoveal priming procedure where participants are exposed to a number in the center of the screen and flashes on each side of the screen. In the present study, participants were asked to sum numbers (0,1,and 2) presented in the center of the screen while indicating which side of the screen a flash appeared (i.e., to hit p if on the right side and q if on the left side). The task presented 75 numbers (on screen for 1.5 seconds each) and 75 stimuli flashes (on screen for 60 milliseconds each) that took approximately 2 minutes total for the participants to complete. For each condition, five semantically related words were presented 15 times each in a random order. For the Positive Power Discrepancy condition the traits were: *powerful, authority, control, influence, and dominant* and for the Negative Power Discrepancy condition: *controlled, powerless, influenced, commanded, and weak*. The summation task was used as a manipulation check to insure that participants were focusing their attention on the number task and not the flashes on the side of the screen. This technique has proven effective in activating trait concepts outside of awareness in past research (e.g. Authors, 2010; Author, 2010) and as such was deemed suitable for this study.

Procedure. Participants took part in the experiment one at a time. When they arrived outside of the conference room (testing room) they were met by the experimenter who accompanied them into the room and explained the procedure. They were informed that the experiment consisted of a series of unrelated tasks. The first task assessed affect (i.e. the PANAS Mood Scale). The second task, a subliminal priming technique, presented the individuals with the subliminal primes that were targeted at influencing the subjects. The third task assessed the individual's perceptions of social interaction. Once again, the exact nature or topic of the questionnaire was not disclosed in order to not elicit any biases during the priming procedure. Finally, the PANAS mood scale was administered in order to measure for mood induction.

At this point, participants were then asked if they wished to proceed with the study, filled out the consent form, and filled out demographic data. Next the experimenter provided instructions for the completion of the visual acuity test. Upon the completion of the visual acuity test, the subject notified the experimenter of completion (was queried for the summation task result), handed the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale (the PANAS scale was attached on the last page of the scenarios), and were told upon completion to bring the materials to the experimenter's office.

Upon completion of the questionnaire the participants underwent the same funneled debriefing procedure as in study 1.

Results

Manipulation. The PANAS mood scales were assessed via within-subjects T tests to assess whether or not mood induction was serving as a mediating variable. The results from the T-tests indicated no significant difference between the scales (PA: $t=1.13$, *n.s.* & NA: $t= 1.29$, *n.s.*), thus implying that there was no mood induction and any differences between conditions are likely to be a result of the priming conditions.

The means of the scales generated by the respondents were analyzed via an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the independent variable (condition level) and gender as a control. Gender of participant was included as a control because of the obvious distinction in perceptions of, or exhibiting of, sexually harassing behaviors.

To test Hypothesis 1, we analyzed the means of the scales via a between-subjects analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). There was a significant main effect for Condition, $F(1, 34) = 4.83$, $p < .05$ such that those individuals in the Positive Power Discrepancy condition had a higher proclivity to sexually harass ($M = 1.69$) than those in the Negative Power Discrepancy condition ($M = 1.10$). Furthermore, gender had a significant effect, $F(1,34) = 6.95$, $p < .05$. These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 2.

Discussion

Subliminally priming individuals with traits of having a positive or negative power discrepancy was shown to engender significant differences in terms of the individual's proclivity to sexually harass another. The results indicate that those individuals primed with traits of a positive power discrepancy had a greater proclivity to sexually harass than those individuals primed with traits of a negative power discrepancy. These findings provide converging evidence with the results from study 1. These findings are important twofold as they 1) provide further evidence of the power → sexually harassing association by Bargh et al (1995) and 2) further supporting the notion here that being exposed to traits of power such as in past experiences (study 1) may in fact engender more sexually harassing behaviors. Furthermore, this study provides supportive evidence to the findings from study 1 such that the findings apparently are not a result of demand characteristics as the utilization of subliminal priming reduced, if not eliminated, the ability of the individuals to detect the presence of the priming.

General Discussion

The findings from these studies illustrate that thinking of a situation in which one was exposed to a power discrepancy with another (study 1) or the traits of that power discrepancy (study 2) is able to influence one's likelihood to sexually harass. In study 1, thinking of a situation in which one had a positive power discrepancy engendered an increased likelihood to sexually harass. In study 2, the presence of traits of such a power discrepancy was utilized to subliminally prime individuals. Results showed that those primed with these traits had an increased likelihood to

sexually harass another thus supporting the power → sexual harassment link posited by others in the field (Bargh et al., 1995; Bargh & Raymond, 1995). These findings also pose an interesting scenario as it suggests that prior exposure to a power discrepancy can influence an individual's likelihood to sexually harass. This is important because there are a myriad of factors that will likely lead to some having a positive power discrepancy while others have a negative power discrepancy such as gender, social status, and culture. This may suggest that men, those who are more affluent, or those in certain cultures will have a higher likelihood of sexually harassing others. This logic is consistent with the ideomotor action research started by James (1890) and furthered by Berkowitz (1984) as he showed when exposed to violent and aggressive images an individual is more likely to be aggressive.

The current study has several strengths. First, two separate studies, utilizing two different priming mechanisms provided converging evidence thus increasing confidence in the findings. Second, the utilization of a subliminal priming technique (study 2) reduced, if not eliminated, the potential for individuals to detect the intent of the study, thus reducing the possibility of certain demand characteristics. Third, and more importantly, the study shows how merely thinking about a situation in the past, can activate relevant memories or cognitions in the present. As was illustrated here, simply thinking of a situation in which one had a positive power discrepancy over another in the past led to an increased likelihood to sexually harass an individual in the present.

However, like all studies, this one was not without its weaknesses. First, some may question the realism or generalizability of the findings due to the experimental nature of the study and the utilization of students. However, it is positioned here that the experimental nature of the study allowed for more clear findings to be collected as it warded off potentially confounding variables, thus increasing internal validity of the study and allowing for a better understanding for how the basic processes of priming can influence one's likelihood to sexually harass. With regards to the use of students, the use of students is common in the study of sexual harassment as sexual harassment is not a phenomenon warded off from the academic environment. In other words, it is possible, if not probable, that the students have been subjected to sexual harassment (whether it be as a target, initiator, or witness) thus they have an appreciation for what is being asked of them.

The current findings also have implications for managers. Managers and companies sexual harassment strategies should be focused on those situations in which an individual has a positive power discrepancy. They should focus even more so on those individuals who have been in power for a long period of time as this chronic exposure will increase the salience and ease that the hypothesized power → sex link can be activated thus increasing the likelihood to sexually harass. Furthermore, companies should educate their workers on the issue of sexual harassment. Specifically, as Lucero et al (2006) found, the threat of discipline can weaken the severity of sexual harassment, therefore presenting those people in the company who have power over others with the company's sexual harassment policy as it serves as a deterrent. On the other hand, the company should also educate those employees in positions typical of a negative power discrepancy as they are more likely to be targets. Making these employees aware of the types of situations that may cause them to fall prey to sexual harassment and informing employees of the

sexual harassment policy may provide those typically in a negative power discrepancy with a greater sense of empowerment thus reducing the chances of sexual harassment occurring.

There are also some future directions that scholars should follow. First, as the study was conducted in a laboratory setting, it would enlighten scholars to conduct a study in a field setting in an effort to increase external validity. Second, as the current study was conducted in a cross-sectional manner, it is important to conduct research on how the habitual presence of power influences sexual harassment. An increase in length of presentation (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998) and the habitual representation (James, 1890) should cause the impact on one's likelihood to sexually harass to increase. Finally, scholars should conduct research into what other aspects of power can be used to activate sexually harassing behaviors. One's likelihood to sexually harass has been shown to be increased by the presentation of traits of power (study 2; Bargh et al., 1995) and memory recall (study 1), but it is likely that other aspects will have similar effects.

All things considered, this research makes an important contribution by documenting how one's past experiences of positive or negative power discrepancy is able to influence one's likelihood to sexually harass. Furthermore, the presentation of the traits of that situation (power, authority, and control) was able to subliminally prime individuals to have increased proclivities to sexually harass. These results highlight the value of continuing to utilize the study of priming, specifically of the power concept, within the sexual harassment literature as a means for better understanding those situations in which one may be an initiator or a target. Given the myriad of stimuli in the workplace that symbolize these power traits, it is felt that the study of nonconsciously activating power can still provide future insights.

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About the Author

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Appendix A: PANAS

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you have felt this way today. Use the following scale to record your answers.

1	2	3	4	5
very slightly or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
___ interested				___ irritable
___ distressed				___ alert
___ excited				___ ashamed
___ upset				___ inspired
___ strong				___ nervous
___ guilty				___ determined
___ scared				___ attentive
___ hostile				___ jittery
___ enthusiastic				___ active
___ proud				___ afraid

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