



EFFECTS OF A DISSOLVED WORKPLACE ROMANCE AND RATER CHARACTERISTICS ON RESPONSES TO A SEXUAL HARASSMENT ACCUSATION

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We examined effects of a dissolved workplace romance and rater characteristics on judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a sexual harassment accusation. Type of romance and the romance motives of both accused and complainant were manipulated in vignettes describing a terminated liaison that resulted in a sexual harassment accusation. Results based on a sample of 226 sheriff's department employees indicate that judgments differed depending on romance motives, and recommended actions differed depending on romance type and rater characteristics. Implications for management research, theory, and practice are discussed.

Given such changes in organizations as the use of mixed-gender work teams and longer work shifts, workplace romance and sexual harassment have become pervasive social-sexual phenomena. Workplace romances are mutually desired relationships involving physical attraction between two employees of the same organization (Pierce, Byrne, & Aguinis, 1996; Powell & Foley, 1998). Seventy-one percent of employees have either observed or participated in a workplace romance (Dillard & Witteman, 1985), 24 percent of managers have been romantically involved with an office colleague at least once (Peak, 1995), and 33 percent of all romances develop at work with a fellow employee (Bureau of National Affairs [BNA], 1988). Unlike workplace romances, sexually harassing behavior entails unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1993). Less blatant forms of harassing behavior such as gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention, which

constitute hostile environment sexual harassment, are common in organizations, certainly more so than blatant forms such as sexual coercion, which constitutes *quid pro quo* harassment (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1994).

Although workplace romance and sexual harassment are both social-sexual phenomena, they are typically examined independently. However, results from a survey of human resource professionals suggest a connection between workplace romances and sexually harassing behavior. Twenty-four percent of the 617 respondents reported that sexual harassment claims occurred in their organizations as direct results of workplace romances (Society for Human Resource Management, 1998). This unfortunate consequence of workplace romances is noteworthy because an American Management Association survey reveals that 48 percent of workplace romances dissolve (Henry, 1995). Dissolved workplace romances may therefore help open the door for sexually harassing behavior between former relational participants (Pierce & Aguinis, 1997a; in press).

There is a second manner in which workplace romance and sexual harassment are linked. Using M.B.A. (master of business administration) students as raters, Summers and Myklebust (1992) conducted a vignette experiment showing that judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a sexual harassment

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complaint are affected by a rater's sex and whether the male accused and female complainant were previously involved with one another in a workplace romance. Their study indicated that a history of romance between an accused and a complainant results in more favorable responses regarding the accused and less favorable responses regarding the complainant. In addition, male raters responded more favorably toward the accused, whereas female raters responded more favorably toward the complainant. From these findings, Summers and Myklebust concluded that an investigator of a sexual harassment complaint might legitimize harassing behavior when the accused and the complainant have a prior history of workplace romance. In an organizational setting, the legitimization of sexually harassing behavior would most likely foster perceptions of unfairness among the complainant and other employees. Researchers, managers, and organizational policy makers could thus benefit from the identification of other factors that influence responses to a sexual harassment complaint made after a terminated workplace romance.

Accordingly, the objective of our study was to examine additional factors hypothesized to affect responses to a sexual harassment accusation made after a dissolved workplace romance. We addressed two research questions: (1) What characteristics of a rater influence his or her judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a hostile environment sexual harassment accusation? (2) What characteristics of a dissolved workplace romance influence a rater's judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a hostile environment sexual harassment accusation? A major goal of addressing these questions was to be able to suggest specific directions for theory development on the link between workplace romance and sexual harassment.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Judgments of Responsibility

By determining an employee's degree of responsibility for harassing behavior, organizations can make informed decisions regarding subsequent personnel actions. It is thus important to identify factors that influence judgments about the cause of a sexual harassment accusation.

Rater sex. Men and women can be differentially motivated when judging the cause of sexually harassing behavior; this difference in motivation is

referred to as an avoidance motive or defensive attribution (Shaver, 1970). Because men are typically accused of harassment by female complainants, male raters want to avoid being responsible in a similar future situation. Thus, they identify with and favor the male accused by attributing more responsibility to the female complainant. That is, male raters are motivated by blame avoidance. Female raters, on the other hand, want to avoid being harmed in a similar future situation. Thus, they identify with and favor the female complainant by attributing more responsibility to the male accused. That is, female raters are motivated by harm avoidance (Summers & Myklebust, 1992). With respect to rater sex, the similarity between rater and accused and between rater and complainant can affect judgments of responsibility for sexually harassing behavior (Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Kenig & Ryan, 1986). We tested the following:

Hypothesis 1. Compared to female raters, male raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as less responsible and a female complainant as more responsible for the harassing behavior.

Type of workplace romance. Compared to lateral (peer-peer) workplace romances, hierarchical (for instance, supervisor-subordinate) workplace romances are typically perceived more negatively among employees for several reasons, including jealousy and suspicion regarding favoritism in terms of pay, promotions, workload, and vacation time (Dillard, Hale, & Segrin, 1994; Mainiero, 1986, 1989). Jealousy and suspicion may stem from the fact that hierarchical romances often involve a social power differential whereby the higher-status participant has the ability to influence, perhaps inappropriately, the lower-status participant (cf. Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, Lee, & Tedeschi, 1996). Although a history of romance between an accused and complainant is known to affect judgments about the cause of a sexual harassment complaint (Summers & Myklebust, 1992), it is not known whether the type of dissolved workplace romance affects such judgments. We tested the following:

Hypothesis 2. Male and female raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as more responsible and a female complainant as less responsible for the harassing behavior when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a hierarchical (male supervisor-female subordinate) as opposed to a lateral workplace romance.

Motive for workplace romance. Previous research has identified three commonly perceived motives for employees' participation in a workplace romance: seeking a long-term companion or spouse (love motive); seeking excitement, adventure, ego satisfaction, or sexual experience (ego motive); and seeking advancement, security, power, financial rewards, lighter workloads, or more vacation time (job-related motive) (Dillard, 1987). Individuals typically perceive a love motive as being genuine and appropriate, whereas they typically perceive ego and job-related motives as being less genuine and inappropriate (Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989; Dillard et al., 1994). It is not known, however, whether employees' motives for participating in a workplace romance affect judgments of responsibility regarding a subsequent sexual harassment accusation. We tested the following:

Hypothesis 3a. Male and female raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as more responsible for the harassing behavior when a dissolved workplace romance entailed an ego (versus a love) motive on the part of the accused and a love (versus an ego or a job-related) motive on the part of the complainant.

Hypothesis 3b. Male and female raters will judge a female complainant as more responsible for the harassing behavior when a dissolved workplace romance entailed a love (versus an ego) motive on the part of the accused and an ego or a job-related (versus a love) motive on the part of the complainant.

Recommended Personnel Actions

Rater sex, type of workplace romance, and motive for workplace romance. Organizations implement a variety of actions in response to sexual harassment incriminations, including ignoring or dropping the issue, giving a written reprimand, and suspension or termination. Summers and Myklebust showed that raters perceive the degree of appropriateness of various personnel actions differently depending on their sex and whether a male accused and a female complainant had a prior history of workplace romance. Compared to female raters, male raters were more lenient with the accused, perhaps because of a blame avoidance motive. Raters were also more lenient with the accused when the accused and the complainant had a prior history of romance, perhaps because the dissolved romance legitimized the harassing behavior. Nevertheless, Summers and Myklebust did

not examine whether type of dissolved workplace romance and participants' romance motives influence raters' responses regarding the appropriateness of various personnel actions. Using the rationale provided for Hypotheses 1-3b, we tested the following:

Hypothesis 4. Compared to female raters, male raters will respond more leniently toward a male accused of sexual harassment and less leniently toward a female complainant.

Hypothesis 5. Male and female raters will respond less leniently toward a male accused of sexual harassment and more leniently toward a female complainant when the accused and the complainant were previously involved in a hierarchical (male supervisor-female subordinate) as opposed to a lateral workplace romance.

Hypothesis 6a. Male and female raters will respond less leniently toward a male accused of sexual harassment when a dissolved workplace romance entailed an ego (versus a love) motive on the part of the accused and a love (versus an ego or a job-related) motive on the part of the complainant.

Hypothesis 6b. Male and female raters will respond less leniently toward a female complainant when a dissolved workplace romance entailed a love (versus an ego) motive on the part of the accused and an ego or a job-related (versus a love) motive on the part of the complainant.

Attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work. An employee's attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work can predict his or her participation in a workplace romance (Pierce et al., 1996; Powell & Foley, 1998). Employees with a more favorable attitude may be more apt to participate in a workplace romance and might expect to do so without being disciplined after a dissolved liaison. To protect themselves from future adversities, employees with a favorable attitude may thus be inclined to recommend against disciplinary action in response to a sexual harassment complaint. In view of this plausible harm avoidance motive, we tested the following:

Hypothesis 7. In terms of disciplinary action, male and female raters with a more favorable attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work will respond more leniently toward a male accused of sexual harassment than will

male and female raters with a less favorable attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work.

METHODS

Sample

The population of study participants was all 781 employees of a sheriff's department. Of these employees, 226 returned completed questionnaires. This return represents a response rate of nearly 30 percent, which is a typical rate for survey research in the social sciences (Berdie, Anderson, & Niebuhr, 1986). Demographics of the sample are as follows: 58 percent men and 42 percent women; 61 percent whites, 24 percent Latinos, 11 percent African Americans, 1 percent Native Americans, and 3 percent "other." Respondent age ranged from 21 to 63 years ($\bar{x} = 39.2$, $s.d. = 10.3$); 99 percent were employed full time, and 58 percent were married. In terms of job titles, 79 percent were deputy sheriffs (34 percent of whom were female), 15 percent were clerical support staff, and 6 percent had "other" job types. Tenure in the organization ranged from 1 to 31 years ($\bar{x} = 9.5$, $s.d. = 7.6$). Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) indicated that ethnicity, employment status, marital status, and job title were not associated with judgments of responsibility or recommended personnel actions ($p's > .05$). In addition, age and tenure in the organization did not correlate with judgments of responsibility or recommended personnel actions ($p's > .05$).

We obtained demographic information for the population of 781 employees to assess the representativeness of our sample. Like our sample, the population contained more men (77%) than women (23%) and contained primarily whites (52%) and Latinos (30%), with fewer African Americans (16%) and Native Americans (1%). Our sample's demographics are also congruent with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (1999) demographic data for sheriffs and clerical employees nationwide. For instance, as in our sample, sheriffs are predominantly white men, and clerical employees are predominantly white women. Lastly, we examined the distribution of scores for each dependent variable to determine whether employees with extremely positive or negative views about workplace romance and sexual harassment were more inclined to participate in our study. These scores were normally distributed across the possible scale values, with skewness and kurtosis statistics generally in the $-.50$ to $.50$ range. Thus, our sample does not seem to be a biased subsample of employees holding extreme views about the issues examined in this study.

Design and Procedures

We administered questionnaires via interagency mail. The questionnaires contained (1) a written vignette describing a dissolved workplace romance and a subsequent hostile environment sexual harassment accusation, (2) manipulation check and background information questions, and (3) measures of dependent variables and demographics. (A copy of the questionnaire can be obtained from the senior author.) Each study participant read a vignette that depicted two employees, Jim and Lisa, who had previously been involved for three years in either a lateral (Jim and Lisa were peers) or a hierarchical (Jim was Lisa's direct supervisor) workplace romance. Jim's motive for dating Lisa was described as either love or ego, and Lisa's motive for dating Jim was described as either love, ego, or job-related. The vignette indicated that a few weeks after their romance terminated, Lisa accused Jim of sexually harassing her at work and reported her complaint to upper-level management. Lisa's complaint was that, even after being repeatedly asked to stop, Jim persisted in rubbing her neck and shoulders at work and telling her sexual jokes that she found offensive. Jim was thus accused of unwanted sexual attention and offensive sexual joking. These two behaviors are perceived as, and legally considered, sexually harassing (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Terpstra & Baker, 1992). The rationale for portraying a hostile environment situation is that this type of harassment is more pervasive than quid pro quo harassment (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991; Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990). In addition, Jim was portrayed as the accused and Lisa was portrayed as the complainant because men are more likely to harass and women are more likely to be harassed (Gutek, 1985; USMSPB, 1994). In short, we used typical and pervasive patterns of behavior with respect to workplace romance and sexual harassment.

In sum, each participant read one of ten vignettes in a two (type of workplace romance: lateral vs. hierarchical) by two (male/accused romance motive: love vs. ego) by three (female/complainant romance motive: love, ego, or job-related) between-subjects experiment with a rater's sex and attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work serving as subject factors. In vignettes depicting a lateral romance, Lisa's motive was described as either love or ego. Lisa's motive was described as job-related only when she was involved in a hierarchical romance. Consequently, study participants were randomly assigned to one of ten conditions rather than the fully crossed 12-cell design.

Measures

Manipulation checks. We used three items placed prior to the focal measures to determine whether the romance type, male/accused romance motive, and female/complainant romance motive manipulations were successful. In addition, four items were used to determine whether study participants accurately perceived descriptive background information in the vignette.

Judgments of responsibility. Respondents indicated their agreement with 18 statements describing potential reasons for Lisa's sexual harassment complaint (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree; items are from Summers [1991, 1996] and Summers and Myklebust [1992]). Nine items involved judging the accused (for example, "Jim is responsible for the sexual harassment complaint") and 9 items involved judging the complainant (for instance, "Lisa is responsible for creating the sexual harassment situation"). As expected, a confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 4.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) supported the fit of a two-factor model for the judgment items (comparative fit index [CFI] = .96, incremental fit index [IFI] = .96, normed fit index [NFI] = .95). (Results of all Amos analyses reported herein are based on using raw data as input and on maximum likelihood estimation). Although a nested one-factor model provided a reasonable fit (CFI = .93, IFI = .93, NFI = .92), the two-factor model provided superior fit ($\Delta\chi^2_1 = 207.81, p < .0001, n = 226$). The two factors underlying the items were called judgment of the accused and judgment of the complainant. Factor loadings (that is, standardized regression coefficients) for (1) judgment-of-the-accused items and their respective underlying factor ranged from .44 to .76, and (2) judgment-of-the-complainant items and their respective underlying factor ranged from .44 to .80. All loadings for each factor were significant at $p < .001$.

Recommended personnel actions. Respondents were asked to take on the role of a human resources manager and rate the appropriateness of 12 personnel actions that could be taken in response to Lisa's sexual harassment complaint (1 = not appropriate, 4 = moderately appropriate, 7 = very appropriate; items are from Summers [1991, 1996] and Summers and Myklebust [1992]). Three items involved rating whether it was appropriate to ignore/drop the issue. Five items involved rating the appropriateness of disciplinary actions toward the accused (including written reprimand, suspension, and termination). Two items involved rating whether it was appropriate to provide the accused and complainant

with social support and sympathy. The remaining two items involved rating whether it was appropriate to provide the accused and complainant with company-funded counseling. As expected, a confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 4.0 supported the fit of a four-factor model for the personnel action items (CFI = .98, IFI = .98, NFI = .97), whereas a nested one-factor model did not provide acceptable fit (CFI = .74, IFI = .75, NFI = .74). Moreover, the four-factor model fit better than the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2_6 = 918.29, p < .0001, n = 226$). The four factors underlying the items represent the following recommended personnel actions: ignore/drop issue, discipline, social support and sympathy, and company-funded counseling. Factor loadings for (1) ignore/drop issue items and their respective underlying factor ranged from .57 to .88, (2) discipline items and their respective underlying factor ranged from .43 to .96, (3) social support and sympathy items and their respective underlying factor ranged from .62 to .99, and (4) company-funded counseling items and their respective underlying factor ranged from .87 to .96. All loadings for each factor were significant at $p < .005$ level.

Attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work. Respondents indicated their agreement with 15 statements from Powell's (1986) 18-item measure of beliefs regarding romance and sexual intimacy at work (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree). As expected, a confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 4.0 supported the fit of a one-factor model for the attitudinal items (CFI = .92, IFI = .92, NFI = .91). Factor loadings for the items ranged from .17 to .99 and each was significant ($p < .01$). To avoid priming effects or reactance, we included this scale after the other measures in the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for judgments of the accused and complainant, recommended personnel actions, and attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work. To assess the convergent and discriminant validity of our measures, we used Amos 4.0 to fit a measurement-only model to the dependent variables listed in Table 1. With respect to convergent validity, the following pairs of variables were specified as correlated: (1) judgment of the accused and judgment of the complainant, (2) attitude toward romance and sexual inti-

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TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Estimates^a

| Variable ^b | Mean | s.d. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| Judgment | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Accused | 4.28 | 1.17 | (.86) | | | | | | |
| 2. Complainant | 3.50 | 1.28 | -.58*** | (.88) | | | | | |
| Personnel action | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Ignore/drop issue | 1.48 | 1.01 | -.32*** | .45*** | (.81) | | | | |
| 4. Discipline | 2.00 | 1.31 | .36*** | -.25*** | -.10 | (.83) | | | |
| 5. Social support and sympathy | 2.48 | 1.76 | .08 | -.11 | -.09 | .06 | (.87) | | |
| 6. Company-funded counseling | 4.09 | 2.17 | .14* | -.17** | -.27*** | .17** | .23*** | (.91) | |
| Romance/sexual intimacy at work | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Attitude | 3.41 | 0.95 | -.20** | .11 | .08 | -.27*** | .07 | -.07 | (.83) |

^a Range of *n*, 224 to 226. Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses on the main diagonal. Correlations reported in this table are among observed study variables, whereas the analogous correlations reported in the text are among latent variables in a measurement model.

^b Greater values for the three categories of variables respectively indicate that a person was judged as responsible for the harassment accusation, a personnel action was considered appropriate, and a more favorable attitude was held toward romance and sexual intimacy at work.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

macy at work and the recommended personnel action of disciplining the accused, and (3) each recommended personnel action with one another. With respect to discriminant validity, the following pairs of variables were specified as not correlated: (1) judgment of the accused and each recommended personnel action, (2) judgment of the complainant and each recommended personnel action, and (3) attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work and judgment of the accused, judgment of the complainant, and the following recommended personnel actions: ignore/drop issue, social support and sympathy, and company-funded counseling.

The analysis supported the fit of this measurement model (CFI = .94, IFI = .94, NFI = .90), which had 43 observed and 7 latent variables. In terms of the latent variables, (1) judgment of the accused was negatively correlated with judgment of the complainant ($r = -.67$, $p < .001$), (2) attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work was negatively correlated with a recommended personnel action of disciplining the accused ($r = -.16$, $p < .03$), (3) a recommended personnel action of social support and sympathy was positively correlated with a recommended personnel action of company-funded counseling ($r = .17$, $p < .07$), (4) a recommended personnel action of ignore/drop issue was negatively correlated with a recommended personnel action of company-funded counseling ($r = -.27$, $p < .001$), (5) a recommended personnel action of disciplining the accused was positively correlated with

a recommended personnel action of company-funded counseling ($r = .14$, $p < .05$). Overall, results of the reliability, confirmatory factor, and measurement model analyses indicate that the measures have sound psychometric properties.

Manipulation Checks

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents accurately reported the nature of Jim and Lisa's relationship, 100 percent accurately reported Jim's romance motive, and 99 percent accurately reported Lisa's romance motive. The three independent variables were thus manipulated successfully. In addition, 100 percent correctly indicated where Jim and Lisa were employed, 98 percent correctly indicated that Jim and Lisa had been dating for three years and working together for five years, and 98 percent correctly indicated that the nature of the alleged sexually harassing behavior was both physical and verbal.

Judgments of Responsibility

To test Hypotheses 1-3b, we conducted two four-way ANOVAs with accused-complainant romance type (lateral vs. hierarchical), male/accused romance motive (love vs. ego), female/complainant romance motive (love, ego, or job-related), and rater sex (male vs. female) as

between-subjects factors.¹ For the first ANOVA, judgment of the accused was the dependent variable (male rater $\bar{x} = 4.30$, s.d. = 1.21; female rater $\bar{x} = 4.23$, s.d. = 1.11). For the second ANOVA, judgment of the complainant was the dependent variable (male rater $\bar{x} = 3.55$, s.d. = 1.27; female rater $\bar{x} = 3.44$, s.d. = 1.29). Both ANOVAs revealed a nonsignificant main effect of rater sex and romance type and, thus, the first two hypotheses were not supported. Consequently, we collapsed across rater sex and romance type for the remaining judgment analyses.

In support of Hypothesis 3a, there was an interaction between the accused's romance motive and the complainant's romance motive on judging the accused ($F_{2, 220} = 3.68$, $p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Specifically, consistent with Hypothesis 3a, the cell means shown in Table 2 indicate that the accused was judged as most responsible for the harassment when he had an ego motive and the complainant had a love motive for participating in the romance ($\bar{x} = 4.66$) and least responsible for the harassment when he had a love motive and the complainant had a job-related motive for participating in the romance ($\bar{x} = 3.52$). These two cell means differed from one another ($t_{68} = 3.80$, $p < .001$).

With respect to Hypothesis 3b, although there was not an interaction between the two factors, there were main effects of the accused's romance motive ($F_{1, 220} = 4.83$, $p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and the complainant's romance motive ($F_{2, 220} = 18.16$, $p <$

¹ For judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions, we initially conducted multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) with accused-complainant romance type, male/accused romance motive, female/complainant romance motive, and rater sex as between-subjects factors. Results indicated that (1) complainant's romance motive influenced judgments of responsibility (Wilks's $\Lambda = .85$, $F_{4, 410} = 8.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$) and (2) rater sex was associated with recommended personnel actions (Wilks's $\Lambda = .95$, $F_{4, 202} = 2.52$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$). However, the observed statistical power for the remaining tests of multivariate main and interactive effects was generally less than .40. Given this low power and the fact that our hypotheses are conceptually grounded in previous workplace romance and sexual harassment research, we decided to conduct and report results of separate ANOVAs instead. Our decision is consistent with Huberty and Morris's conclusion that "to require MANOVA as a prerequisite of multiple ANOVAs is illogical, and the comfort of statistical protection is an illusion" (1989: 307). For each univariate analysis reported herein, the dependent variable was normally (or approximately normally) distributed, and the homogeneity of variance assumption was satisfied.

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Judgments of
Accused and Complainant by Workplace
Romance Motives^a

| Complainant's Romance Motive | Accused's Romance Motive | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | Love | | Ego | |
| | Mean | s.d. | Mean | s.d. |
| Judgment of accused | | | | |
| Love | 4.34 | 1.19 | 4.66 ^b | 1.30 |
| Ego | 4.40 | 1.14 | 4.10 | 0.96 |
| Job | 3.52 ^b | 0.96 | 4.26 | 1.14 |
| Judgment of complainant | | | | |
| Love | 3.18 | 1.33 | 2.87 | 1.42 |
| Ego | 3.61 | 1.14 | 3.49 | 1.02 |
| Job | 4.61 | 0.77 | 3.97 | 1.10 |

^a $n = 226$. Greater values indicate that a person was judged as responsible for the harassment accusation. Means are based on collapsing across rater sex and romance type. Means with the same superscript differ from one another at $p < .001$.

.001, $\eta^2 = .14$) on judging the complainant. In line with Hypothesis 3b, the complainant was judged as most responsible for the harassment when the accused had a love motive ($\bar{x} = 3.67$) compared to an ego motive ($\bar{x} = 3.34$) for participating in the romance and she had either an ego ($\bar{x} = 3.55$) or a job-related motive ($\bar{x} = 4.28$) compared to a love motive ($\bar{x} = 3.01$) for participating in the romance. For the complainant's motive, Tukey's HSD tests indicated that having either an ego or a job-related motive differed from having a love motive (p 's $< .005$).

Recommended Personnel Actions

To test Hypotheses 4–6b, we conducted four four-way ANOVAs with accused-complainant romance type, male/accused romance motive, female/complainant romance motive, and rater sex as between-subjects factors (see footnote 1). The dependent variables were the following recommended personnel actions: ignore/drop issue, discipline, social support and sympathy, and company-funded counseling.

Consistent with Hypothesis 4, there was a main effect of rater sex on the personnel action of ignoring or dropping the issue ($F_{1, 205} = 6.45$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$). The means shown in Table 3 reveal that, compared to female raters ($\bar{x} = 1.31$), male raters ($\bar{x} = 1.59$) indicated it was more appropriate to ignore the harassment complaint and drop the issue. Hypothesis 4 was therefore partially supported.




TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations for Recommended Personnel Actions by Rater Sex and Type of Workplace Romance^a

| Personnel Action | Rater Sex | | | | Romance Type | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | Male | | Female | | Lateral | | Hierarchical | |
| | Mean | s.d. | Mean | s.d. | Mean | s.d. | Mean | s.d. |
| 1. Ignore/drop issue | 1.59 ^b | 1.15 | 1.31 ^b | 0.72 | 1.53 | 1.00 | 1.44 | 1.01 |
| 2. Discipline | 1.95 | 1.19 | 2.07 | 1.46 | 1.74 ^c | 1.09 | 2.16 ^c | 1.41 |
| 3. Social support and sympathy | 2.64 | 1.72 | 2.26 | 1.81 | 2.59 | 1.69 | 2.42 | 1.81 |
| 4. Company-funded counseling | 4.03 | 2.18 | 4.17 | 2.16 | 4.04 | 2.10 | 4.13 | 2.22 |

^a $n = 226$. Greater values indicate that a personnel action was considered appropriate. Means are based on collapsing across accused and complainant romance motives. Means with the same superscript differ from one another at $p < .02$.

Consistent with Hypothesis 5, there was a main effect of romance type on the personnel action of discipline ($F_{1, 205} = 5.52, p < .02, \eta^2 = .03$). The means shown in Table 3 reveal that raters indicated it was more appropriate to discipline the accused when the accused and complainant had been previously involved in a hierarchical ($\bar{x} = 2.16$) as opposed to a lateral ($\bar{x} = 1.74$) workplace romance. Hypothesis 5 was therefore partially supported.

Inconsistent with Hypothesis 6, there was no interaction between accused romance motive and complainant romance motive on any of the personnel actions. However, there was an interaction between rater sex and complainant romance motive on the personnel action of company-funded counseling ($F_{2, 205} = 4.21, p < .02, \eta^2 = .04$). Male raters differed from female raters only when the complainant had a job-related motive ($t_{47} = -2.58, p < .01$). Specifically, compared to female raters ($\bar{x} = 5.07$), male raters ($\bar{x} = 3.50$) indicated that company-funded counseling was less appropriate.

To test Hypothesis 7, we computed a correlation between attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work and the personnel action of discipline. In contrast to previous research (Pierce, 1998; Powell, 1986), our results showed no sex difference either for the attitude composite ($t_{223} = 0.74, p > .05$; male rater $\bar{x} = 3.45, s.d. = 0.94$, female rater $\bar{x} = 3.35, s.d. = 0.97$), or for any of the scale items and, accordingly, we computed a zero-order correlation rather than a partial correlation controlling for sex. In support of Hypothesis 7, male and female raters with more favorable attitudes indicated it was less appropriate to discipline the accused ($r = -.27, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

With respect to our first research question, results are consistent with Hypotheses 4 and 7 in that

a rater's sex and attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work were each associated with a recommended personnel action. With respect to our second research question, results support Hypothesis 3a in that the accused's and complainant's romance motives interacted to influence a rater's judgment of the accused. Moreover, results indicate that the accused's and complainant's romance motives each influenced a rater's judgment of the complainant. Results are also consistent with Hypothesis 5 in that type of romance influenced the recommended personnel action of disciplining the accused. These results add to Summers and Myklebust's contribution to the literature by indicating that (1) judgments are influenced by accused's and complainant's romance motives, (2) recommended personnel actions are influenced by type of workplace romance, and (3) recommended personnel actions are associated with a rater's sex and attitude toward romance and sexual intimacy at work.

Implications for Management Research

Although male and female raters can be differentially motivated when judging the cause of sexually harassing behavior (Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Kenig & Ryan, 1986), our results are not consistent with this finding. Considering the raters' previous training regarding their organization's sexual harassment policy and their possible awareness of this policy, one might not expect these male and female employees to differ with respect to judgments about degree of responsibility. In line with this assertion is the finding, which is also inconsistent with prior research (Pierce, 1998; Powell, 1986), that male and female raters did not differ in their attitudes toward romance and sexual intimacy at work.

Perceived motives for participating in a workplace romance and employee gossip about such motives are known to affect third-party evaluations

of romance participants (Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Dillard, 1987; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989). In line with this prior research, our results suggest that raters' perceptions of a couple's romance motives influence their judgments regarding which party is responsible for a sexual harassment complaint. Future research could thus examine whether workplace romance participants attempt to, and are able to, manage a favorable impression at work (for instance, having a love motive) so as to avoid being judged as responsible for sexually harassing behavior. Future research could also examine whether raters weigh accused and complainant romance motives equally or unequally when judging the cause of sexually harassing behavior. Perhaps there are certain conditions under which the romance motive of either the accused or the complainant is assigned greater importance.

With regard to recommended personnel actions, raters indicated that disciplining the accused was more appropriate when the prior romance was hierarchical as opposed to lateral. This result is consistent with research indicating that supervisor-subordinate romances are often perceived more negatively than peer-peer romances and that the former have more negative job-related ramifications (BNA, 1988; Dillard et al., 1994; Mainiero, 1986, 1989). However, raters with more favorable attitudes toward romance and sexual intimacy at work reported that discipline was less appropriate. Also, compared to female raters, male raters indicated it was more appropriate to ignore the harassment complaint altogether. Thus, the degree of leniency with respect to decisions about a hostile environment harassment complaint may also be associated with attributes of the decision maker.

In the future, researchers could examine additional types of workplace romances (for instance, direct- and indirect-reporting liaisons, same-sex liaisons, female supervisor-male subordinate liaisons); rater characteristics (such as degree of managerial experience, prior history of being sexually harassed, prior history of participating in a workplace romance); and sexually harassing behavior (such as other forms of hostile environment harassment and quid pro quo harassment) to gain a more precise understanding of the effects of dissolved romances on responses to ensuing sexual harassment accusations.

Implications for Management Theory

One theory that has been advanced as an explanation for the effects of a previously dissolved workplace romance on raters' responses to a subsequent sexual harassment accusation is legitimiza-

tion. Specifically, Summers and Myklebust (1992) ascertained that an investigator of a sexual harassment complaint might legitimize harassing behavior simply because the accused and complainant had a prior history of workplace romance. Legitimization would entail judging an individual who is responsible for harassing behavior as not responsible and/or recommending in favor of a lenient personnel action or against a harsh personnel action. Our results suggest that there may be certain conditions under which such legitimization is most likely to occur. That is, factors beyond the history of the romance between the accused and the complainant affected raters' responses to the harassment accusation. We therefore posit that an investigator of a hostile environment sexual harassment complaint might wrongfully legitimize harassing behavior, depending on specific characteristics of a dissolved liaison such as the nature of the accused's and complainant's romance motives and the type of romance in question. To build upon this assertion, we offer a proposition as an interpretation of our results that will, we hope, promote paradigmatic research on the link between workplace romance and sexual harassment.

We propose that a rater has a schema, or a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), for what he or she considers to be a genuine and thus an appropriate workplace romance. We acknowledge that this schema would be influenced by rater characteristics and an organization's culture (by aspects such as organizational policy and management's tolerance for workplace romance). Nevertheless, we believe that the schema would also be affected by attributes of a dissolved workplace romance, such as type of romance and participants' romance motives. We believe that when a rater is presented with the task of responding to a sexual harassment complaint, the rater's workplace romance schema is activated. If the dissolved romance under scrutiny is not congruent with the rater's schema for a genuine liaison, then the rater might question the appropriateness of the romantic relationship and, consequently, make judgments and recommend personnel actions based on his or her evaluation of the dissolved romance.

In terms of the underlying social-cognitive process, we propose that the following three steps occur when a rater is asked to respond to a sexual harassment complaint that stems from a dissolved workplace romance: First, the rater gathers available information regarding specific characteristics of the dissolved workplace romance. Knowledge about specific characteristics of the liaison will help the rater to categorize the former romance as

either genuine or not genuine. We believe that certain characteristics of a prior romance will be perceived as genuine (for example, love motives and a lateral relationship), and certain characteristics will not be perceived as genuine (for example, job-related motives and a direct-reporting hierarchical relationship), depending on the rater's schema for workplace romance. Second, after the rater categorizes the former romance as either genuine or not genuine, he or she will evaluate the former romance in terms of its degree of appropriateness. Dissolved romances that are categorized as genuine will, depending on the rater's schema for workplace romance, have a greater likelihood of being evaluated as appropriate than dissolved romances that are categorized as not genuine. Third, the rater's responses to a sexual harassment complaint will be affected by his or her evaluation of the appropriateness of the terminated romance. That is, the rater will be more likely to wrongfully legitimize sexually harassing behavior when he or she evaluated the prior liaison as being appropriate rather than not appropriate. Each of these three hypothesized steps should be tested in future research.

Considering this proposed social-cognitive process, one might expect a rater's workplace romance schema to operate in the same manner for judgments of responsibility as for recommended personnel actions. However, our results indicate that these responses were not affected in the same manner by type of romance, romance motives, and rater sex. There are several plausible explanations for this finding. One is that, from the standpoint of a decision maker's personal liability, judgments of responsibility may be easier to make because they typically have fewer ramifications than decisions about personnel actions. Another plausible explanation is raters' lack of knowledge regarding the accused's and complainant's organizational culture with respect to workplace romance and harassing behavior. Absent this information, perhaps the raters in the present study based their recommended personnel actions on factors other than those manipulated in the vignette. Finally, it is also possible that there are other personnel actions that raters would have considered to be appropriate. Before concluding that judgments and recommended actions are affected differently by our independent variables, additional personnel actions should be examined (transfer and demotion, for example).

Implications for Management Practice

Designers of training and development programs should consider educating policy makers, manag-

ers, and other decision makers about the potentially biasing effects of characteristics of a rater and of a dissolved workplace romance on responses to hostile environment sexual harassment complaints. Without such training, sexually harassing behavior between former romance participants may be wrongfully legitimized. Training and development programs should also consider educating employees about potential risks associated with participating in workplace romances. Across levels of our independent variables, disciplining the accused was rated as an inappropriate action, whereas company-funded counseling was rated as the most appropriate action (see Table 1). Although raters evaluated a less blatant form of sexual harassment, there are potentially negative repercussions. For instance, employees who engage in harassing behavior may not be duly reprimanded, thereby suggesting to others that such behavior does not have serious ramifications.

Limitations

First, in terms of the generalizability of our results, the fact that we examined typical and pervasive patterns of organizational behavior must be considered. For example, female supervisor-male subordinate romances would most likely result in different responses than male supervisor-female subordinate romances. In addition, nonresponse bias was a potential threat to the external validity of our experiment. Some employees may have chosen not to participate in our study because of the sensitive and controversial nature of the topics examined. However, our sample was demographically similar to the population from which it came and, moreover, it did not merely consist of extreme respondents. Furthermore, demographic characteristics of the sample were not associated with our dependent variables.

Second, methodologies other than vignettes should be used to replicate our results. In addition to videotape, highly immersive virtual reality computer technology could be used (Pierce & Aguinis, 1997b). Nevertheless, the vignettes enabled us to hold constant several contextual variables, including the presence of conflicting evidence and hearsay, while manipulating and isolating the effects of our primary factors of interest. Despite their limitations, vignettes are a commonly used and widely accepted method for conducting research in management (Murphy, Herr, Lockhart, & Maguire, 1986), particularly when the research topic is at a preparadigmatic stage.

Third, one might argue that because we used a vignette, the romance motive manipulations were artificially salient. However, employee gossip about

workplace romances is common and frequently centers around motives for why others partake in such liaisons (Dillard, 1987), which increases employees' awareness of the motives. Whether they base attributions on hearsay or on firsthand knowledge, individuals attribute love, ego, and job-related motives to workplace romance participants (Dillard, 1987; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989; Dillard et al., 1994). Thus, salient workplace romance motives are not atypical but rather typical in natural settings. Researchers could, however, examine whether the source of information (first- or third-party) regarding romance motives also affects responses to a sexual harassment accusation.

Finally, one might argue that responses to the judgment and personnel action measures affected responses to the attitude measure. However, the mean attitude score in our study ($\bar{x} = 3.41$, $s.d. = 0.95$) is similar in value to an analogous mean attitude score reported by Pierce (1998; $\bar{x} = 3.59$, $s.d. = 1.06$), who used Powell's (1986) items but did not examine judgments and personnel actions.

Conclusion

Workplace romances, although they are conceptually distinct from sexually harassing behavior, should be considered in the context of organizational decision making regarding hostile environment sexual harassment accusations. We speculate that employees, including investigators of harassment complaints, have schemas for what they consider to be genuine and thus appropriate workplace romances. If that is so, organizations' managers need to be aware of the potentially biasing effects of previously dissolved workplace romances on responses to subsequent sexual harassment accusations.

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