Brand Response-Effects of Perceived Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

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Although sexual harassment literature indicates significant relationships between sexual harassment and both individual and organizational outcomes, no published research has examined the effects of sexual harassment on attitude and behavioral brand-related factors of potential job applicants. To help close this research gap, a structural equation model that relates perceived sexual harassment in the workplace to attitudes toward the brand, brand image, and intentions to work for a firm, is developed and tested. Using data from undergraduate business students, the empirical results provide support for these relationships and the structural equation model.

Business scholars and professionals agree that the negativity associated with workplace sexual harassment can impede strategy implementation and also damage stakeholder value. Although the study of work-related sexual harassment is not new (e.g., individual and organizational outcomes of sexual harassment have been examined), the simultaneous effects of such ill-advised behavior on brand perceptions and employee recruitment remains a mystery.

Thus, it is unclear how a firm's reputation of a sexual harassment culture influences prospective job applicant's responses toward the brand and their willingness to work for the firm. To help fill this research gap, we propose a conceptual model that examines the effects of perceived sexual harassment in the workplace (i.e., in a sales firm) on attitudinal (i.e., attitudes toward the brand, brand image) and behavioral (i.e., intentions to work) brand-response factors of potential employees.

Sexual Harassment Literature

Sexual harassment is a serious social dilemma that negatively affects individuals, organizations, and society (Gelfand, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 1995; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). Since 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized sexual harassment as being illegal (e.g., Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 1993; Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, 1986). However, over the past ten years, reported incidents of workplace sexual harassment have increased 2,700 percent (Gilbert, 2005).

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (1980), the federal agency in charge of enforcing sexual harassment claims, "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute *sexual harassment* when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for an employment decision affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment" (29 CFR Part 1604).

Based on this definition, two types of sexual harassment are recognized, including *quid pro quo* and *hostile environment.* The former pertains to hiring, firing, promoting, and/or compensating based on an employee's submission to sexual demands; the latter occurs when a perpetrator creates an odious or daunting work environment for victims (Bennett-Alexander & Pincus, 1994; Robinson et al., 1998).

To qualify for *quid pro quo* sexual harassment, the following conditions must be evident: (1) there must a request or demand for sexual favors; (2) there must be an expressed or implied threat to a "material" job benefit related to the employee's acceptance or rejection of the sexual activity; and (3) the supervisor or manager must be in a position to implement the threat (Moylan v. Maries County, 1986). In order for the harassment to be considered *hostile environment* sexual harassment, the victim must show that the verbal or physical conduct was sufficient, severe, or pervasive, which created an abusive environment that adversely affected his/her ability to work effectively (Bennett-Alexander & Pincus, 1994; Robinson, Fink & Lane, 1994).

From defining its domain and tabulating its frequency, research on sexual harassment has advanced to examining its antecedents and effects (Collins & Blodgett, 1981). Previous studies show that the organizational climate, job gender context (e.g., proportion of women in the organization), demographic factors like gender, and behavioral traits (e.g., aggressive and forceful behavior) affect sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Terpstra & Baker, 1986). Additionally, obtaining sexual favors or activities and/or abusing or increasing one's

power over someone else are significant determinants of workplace sexual harassment (O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold & Griffin, 2000; Stringer et al., 1990).

Previous studies have examined the organizational and individual outcomes of sexual harassment in the workplace. In terms of organizational outcomes resulting from sexual harassment, negative correlates include business and team performance, workgroup productivity, and recruiting, retaining, and motivating employees (Langhout et al., 2005; Lengnick-Hall, 1995; Raver & Gelfand, 2005). Also, lawsuits brought against organizations (Popovich & Licata, 1987; Terpstra & Baker, 1986) and hostile work environments (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1994) can result from workplace sexual harassment. Additionally, arguments suggest that a company's reputation and image (Terpstra & Baker, 1986), and its ability to attract and retain employees (Lengnick-Hall, 1995) can both be negatively affected by workplace sexual harassment.

In terms of individual effects, sexual harassment in the workplace relates negatively to job satisfaction and physical health, but relates positively to lawsuits, employee stress, absenteeism, on-the-job inefficiencies, self-blame, detrimental psychological states (e.g., degradation, depression), and employee turnover (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Langhout et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 1998; Stedham & Mitchell, 1998; Terpstra & Baker, 1986; Terpstra & Baker, 1989; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007).

Although the aforementioned literature is useful in explaining antecedents and effects of workplace sexual harassment, additional research examining a broader range of attitudinal and behavioral consequences of sexual harassment is needed (Gilbert, 2005; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Schneider, Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997). For example, studying the effects of sexual harassment on brand-related factors should add meaningful insight into harassment inquiry (Foy, 2000). This may help firms devise strategies (e.g., modify policy statements, emphasize internal branding) to alleviate sexual harassment in the workplace. Thus, we propose for the first time, a conceptual model that examines the brand-related, attitudinal (i.e., attitudes toward the brand, brand image) and behavioral (i.e., intentions to work) effects of workplace sexual harassment of potential job applicants.

Brand Image Literature and Hypotheses

Sexual harassment not only leads to employees feeling negatively about their work and workplace (Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982), it also adversely affects organizations (e.g., Raver & Gelfand, 2005) and individuals (e.g., Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007). For example, in casino organizations, government agencies, and public utility companies, sexual harassment either by supervisors or coworkers negatively affects work satisfaction and organizational commitment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Glomb et al., 1997; Morrow, McElroy & Phillips, 1994; Stedham & Mitchell, 1998). Likewise, in the U.S. Armed Forces, sexual harassment has a negative effect on job satisfaction, psychological well-being, health perceptions, workgroup productivity, and organizational commitment (Langhout et al., 2005). For Latinas who experienced sexual harassment, job dissatisfaction and life dissatisfaction, as well as organizational

withdrawal, increased (Cortina, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 2002).

Additionally, workplace sexual harassment can be detrimental in terms of developing a brand, hiring, and retaining effective employees. For example, conceptual frameworks suggest that sexual harassment has a negative effect on company reputation and image (Foy, 2000; Terpstra & Baker, 1986) through direct (e.g., confrontation) and indirect (e.g., avoidance) effects on victims. It can also negatively affect attraction and retention of employees (Lengnick-Hall, 1995).

The financial ramifications of such hidden costs like demoralized employees, in addition to overt costs such as litigation, can prove difficult to overcome and detrimental to organizational development, sustainability, and growth (Foy, 2000; Terpstra & Baker, 1986). Thus, workplace sexual harassment leads to grim consequences for organizations, individuals, and society in general. Because of the negative perception associated with, and the damaging effects of sexual harassment, we expect workplace sexual harassment in a sales context to correlate negatively with prospective employee responses toward the brand and their willingness to work for the firm. Thus, we tested the following hypotheses:

H1: For prospective employees in a sales context, perceived sexual harassment in the workplace is negatively related to their attitudes toward the brand.
H2: For prospective employees in a sales context, perceived sexual harassment in the workplace is negatively related to their brand image of this firm.
H3: For prospective employees in a sales context, perceived sexual harassment in the workplace is negatively related to their intentions to work for this firm.

Arguments suggest that consumers' attitudes toward brands, which are internal assessments of particular brands (Mitchell & Olson, 1981), can be influenced by their perceived image of such brands (Winters, 1986), where brand image pertains to, "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory," (Keller, 1993, p.3). Thus, corporate-based brand representation via economic and non-economic factors, influences cognitive-related brand responses (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). For example, corporate credibility has a positive effect on attitudes toward the brand (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000; Lafferty, Goldsmith & Newell, 2002). Also, in examining consumer behavior pertaining to low-involvement household goods (e.g., dish detergent) and high-involvement cosmetic goods (e.g., lotion), corporate image correlates positively with attitudes toward the brand (Suh & Yi, 2006). The attitudes toward the brand construct is considered a determinant of and thus, distinct from brand image (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Suh & Yi, 2006). We anticipate then, that in a sales-oriented and recruitment-related context, brand image will relate positively with brand attitudes. Hence, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H4: Prospective employees' brand image of a sales firm is positively related to their attitudes toward the brand.

Generally, consumers' attitudes strongly influence their purchase behaviors (Holmes & Crocker, 1987; Pope & Voges, 2000; Priester et al., 2004; Whittler, 1989).

For example, across various advertising contexts, attitudes toward the brand are positively related with intentions to purchase the advertised brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty et al., 1989). Because brand attitudes are a basis for consumer intentions and behaviors (Keller, 1993), we expect prospective employees' brand attitudes toward a potential employer to correlate positively to their willingness to work for this firm. Thus, we assessed the following hypothesis:

H5: Prospective employees' attitudes toward a sales firm's brand are positively related to their intentions to work for this firm.

Building on the notion that brand perceptions have the capacity to influence consumer behavioral responses toward the brand source, arguments suggest that customers' perceptions of brand image can influence their behaviors and intentions regarding that brand (Biel, 1992; Ferrand & Pages, 1999). For example, for sporting event sponsors, corporate image relates positively to purchase intention (Pope & Voges, 2000). Similarly, for print advertisers, brand image correlates positively with purchase intentions of the advertised brand (Batra & Homer, 2004).

Applying these findings to employment and recruiting, Belt and Paolillo (1982) found a positive relationship between corporate image and reader response to a recruitment advertisement. Turban and Greening (1996) revealed a positive relationship between corporate social performance and attracting applicants. Additionally, in a recruiting context, Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager (1993), found a positive relationship between corporate image and initial decisions about pursuing contact with organizations. Some arguments also suggest that employer image influences employee attraction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). These findings and arguments suggest that an employee's willingness to work at a particular firm is influenced by that individual's perceived image of that firm (Sullivan, 2003). Hence, customers and employees appear to respond analogously to certain business facets, such as processes and brands. In terms of processes, customers and employees respond similarly to failed services when recovered effectively and service procedures when role expectations are understood (Chung-Herrera, Goldschmidt & Hoffman, 2004; Mohr & Bitner, 1991). In terms of brand perceptions, customer and employee responses did not vary in terms of firm competence, reliability, and prestige (Chun & Davies, 2006).

Although the aforementioned research offers insight into brand image effects on employee attraction to the firm, no research has specifically examined the direct effect of brand image, as influenced by perceived workplace sexual harassment, on prospective employee intentions to work for the firm. To explore if the brand image of a firm correlates positively with one's willingness to work for the firm, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Prospective employees' brand image of a sales firm is positively related to their intentions to work for this firm.

The conceptual model shown in Figure 1 summarizes these six hypotheses. The scales and methods used for data collection prior to evaluating the hypotheses with a structural equation model are described below.

Figure 1: *Conceptual Model*
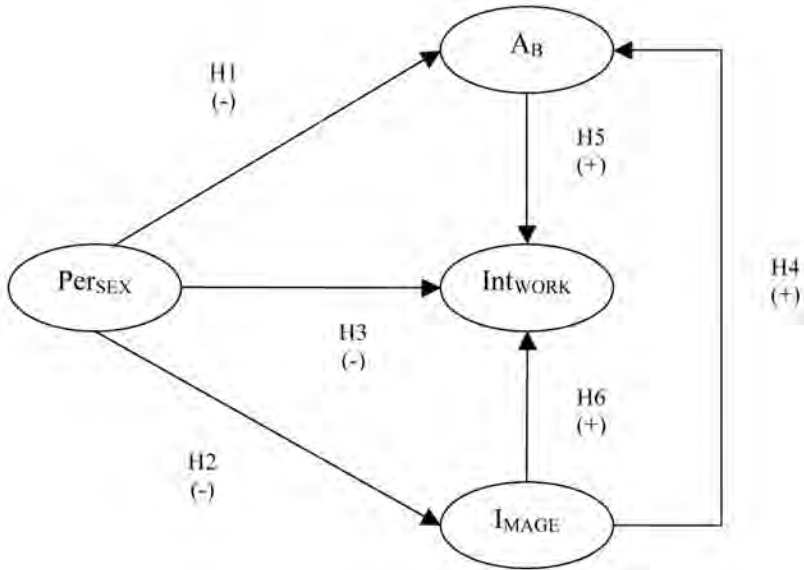
Methodology

Scale Descriptions
    The survey contained questions from four scales pertaining to perceived sexual harassment (Per$_{SEX}$), attitudes toward the brand (AB), brand image (I$_{MAGE}$), and intentions to work (Int$_{WORK}$). Table 1 lists the 19 items comprising the four scales. We briefly describe each of these scales.

Perceived Sexual Harassment
    Sexual harassment is regarded as a matter of perception (Terpstra, 1996) and can be experienced personally, indirectly, and/or by third parties. Personal sexual harassment is experienced by one individual as a result of others' actions (e.g., being subjected to suggestive jokes or remarks about one's personal sexuality). Indirect or ambient sexual harassment pertains to indirect exposure to sexual harassment (Glomb et al., 1997) (e.g., being subjected and negatively affected by suggestive jokes or remarks about a coworker's sexuality). Third party sexual harassment entails sexual harassment of a firm's employees by third parties, such as customers and business partners (Aalberts & Seidman, 1994). Examples of this sexual harassment include being subjected to suggestive jokes or remarks about one's personal sexuality from

customers and/or business partners. For this study, our vignette design examines perceived *ambient* sexual harassment in the workplace.

Active measures of sexual harassment may incur substantial self-report bias (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995). To help alleviate such bias, a structured, indirect-question, multi-vignette-based scale, for Per$_{SEX}$ was used. This measure is a modified and broadened version of the sexual harassment instruments used in Swift and Denton (1994) and York (1989). Originally, six items or vignettes were developed; however, factor analysis results revealed that only three of the original six items loaded on the same factor. Hence, Per$_{SEX}$ was measured with a three-item, seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (clearly no) to 7 (clearly yes). Previous research investigating sexual harassment supports the use of vignettes (Gervasio & Ruckdeschel, 1992; Gowan & Zimmerman, 1996; Hartnett, Robinson & Singh, 1989; Terpstra & Baker, 1989). To operationalize Per$_{SEX}$, respondents were asked to read a series of short vignettes pertaining to a fictitious U.S. sales firm and indicate whether the act described in the vignette could be considered sexual harassment. The vignettes (Wason, Polonsky & Hyman, 2002) included sufficient detail about conditions pertaining to sexual harassment, such as gender harassment, sexist hostility, unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, verbal remarks, and nonverbal displays (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gruber, 1992; Wright & Bean, 1993). Because women are more likely to be sexually harassed at work compared to men (Leap & Gray, 1980; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982), each vignette depicted a female being sexually harassed by a male (see Appendix).

Attitudes toward the Brand

Defined as the internal assessment of a certain brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981), A$_B$ was measured with a four-item, seven-point, semantic differential scale based on the scale used in Grier and Deshpandé (2001), which was meant to assess general attitudes about an advertised brand. Thus, A$_B$ is operationalized as a *general* overall assessment of a brand (e.g., degree of favorableness). The four items are anchored by the bipolar endpoints: unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, and negative/positive.

Brand Image

Brand image is a multi-faceted construct comprised of multiple brand factors pertaining to an organization and its offerings (Biel, 1992; Keller, 1993; Smith, 2004). A review of the literature on brand image (Davies et al., 2004) inspired a new, nine-item measure. This measure was intended to accurately capture distinct corporate and product image dimensions of brand image (Biel, 1992), and thus, is operationalized as concrete or specific content assessments of a brand (Boush & Jones, 2006; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Factor analysis results revealed that only seven of the original nine items loaded on the same factor. Hence, I$_{MAGE}$ was measured with a new, seven-item, seven-point, semantic differential scale, anchored by bipolar endpoints. For the corporate image dimension these endpoints are: not credible/credible (Blackston, 1992), not prestigious/prestigious (Hsieh, 2002), disreputable/reputable (Herbig & Milewicz, 1995), and indecent/virtuous (Hamilton, 2000). For the *product* image

dimension the endpoints are: not trustworthy/trustworthy (Driesener & Romaniuk, 2006), low quality/high quality (Völckner & Sattler, 2006), and unreliable/reliable (Hsieh, 2002).

Intentions to Work

We argue that intentions to work pertain to the likelihood that a person will choose to work for a specific company, which is similar to existing recruitment conceptualizations such as organizational attractiveness as an employer and willingness to work for the union (Gordon et al., 1980; Liden & Parsons, 1986; Turban & Greening, 1996). To offer a sound assessment of intentions to work, and because intentions are a robust proxy of actual behaviors (Ajzen, 1991; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), we use a five-item, seven-point, semantic differential scale based on the purchase intention scales used in Holmes and Crocker (1987) and Mackenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986). The five items are anchored by the bipolar endpoints: would not seek out/would seek out, not very likely/very likely, improbable/probable, would not consider/would consider, and unwilling/willing.

Pretest

The factor structure and reliability of the four scales were assessed. Forty-four undergraduate business students attending a large research university in the southwestern U.S. supplied the requisite data during a regularly scheduled class. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation was used to assess factor structure. Missing data were handled via pairwise deletion. The four and five items used to measure A_B and Int_{WORK} respectively, loaded appropriately. For the I_{MAGE} and Per_{SEX} scales, cross-loadings among some items were evident. Except for the Per_{SEX} measure, all scale reliabilities were adequate (i.e., >.70) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Based on respondents' written feedback about the Per_{SEX} scale (e.g., this sentence is confusing), changes were made to the wording of some items used in the main study.

Procedure for Main Study

Undergraduate students enrolled in the business college of a large research university located in the southwest U.S. were asked to complete a ten-minute questionnaire during regularly scheduled classes. Students received prior notice about survey administration and were informed that they were participating in a study about sexual harassment in the workplace. The survey administrator reminded students repeatedly that their responses were anonymous. To control for possible previous sexual harassment experiences, it was conveyed to students that their responses were based solely on the information regarding the sales firm described in the survey. Students were debriefed and offered course extra credit for their efforts.

A definition of sexual harassment, based on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's interpretation of what constitutes sexual harassment, was provided at the onset of the questionnaire; it read: "Sexual harassment can be defined as any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behavior. Such behaviors include: verbal (e.g., crude sexual comments), non-verbal (e.g., looking someone 'up-and-down'), physical (e.g., brushing up against someone 'accidentally'), and/or visual (e.g., displaying sexual

images).” Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate (either yes or no), if after graduating from college, the prospect of working in a sales-related field was plausible. Respondents who answered no accounted for 2% of the original sample and were eliminated from the sample. Respondents who answered yes (N=217) were then asked to read a brief description, about a fictitious U.S. sales firm, which included data pertaining to number of employees, product offerings, gross annual revenue, and trading areas. Next, respondents read vignettes about the fictitious sales firm. Each vignette was embedded with potential sexual harassment situations, and respondents were asked to indicate the degree of sexual harassment described in each vignette. Subsequently, responses were given regarding attitudes toward the brand, brand image, and intentions to work for this firm.

Sample Profile

The final sample size of 217 respondents meets the requirements for effective structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2006). Males (54.7%) outnumber females, and the ethnicities represented are White (81.7%), Hispanic (8.9%), Asian (4.2%), American Indian (2.8%), and Black (2.3%). The mean age of respondents is 22.18 (SD = 4.39); the majority is either junior (54.7%) or senior (35.8%) level college students, and 74.9% of the sample are employed.

Results

Independent sample t-test results for males (n=115) and females (n=95) and each of the three items used to measure (Per_{SEX}) revealed non-significant mean differences at the P<0.05; that is, for *vignette* 1, M_{Males}=3.46, $M_{Females}$=3.92, t(208)=-1.75, P=0.08, for *vignette* 2, M_{Males}=5.19, $M_{Females}$=5.13, t(208)=0.23, P=0.81, and for *vignette* 3, M_{Males}=3.38, $M_{Females}$=3.71, t(208)=-1.32, P=0.18. Because men and women responded similarly to perceived sexual harassment in the workplace (Hartnett, Robinson & Singh, 1989; York, 1989), data pooling was justified for the analyses.

Factor Structure

Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used to confirm the structure of the 19 items that comprised the four scales. Missing data was handled via pairwise deletion. The resulting four factor solution, in which each item loaded on the appropriate factor, accounted for 67.24% of the variance. Reliabilities for the four scales ranged from α=.731-.928, which exceed the .70 threshold for preliminary research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Coefficient alphas and factor loadings are provided in Table 1. High factor loadings and alphas are desirable because they provide evidence for reliability and convergent validity (i.e., items attempting to measure the same construct are highly correlated). The lack of significant cross-loadings (see Table 1) provides evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 1: *Factor Loadings and Reliabilities*

Construct Alpha	Scale Items (AB, INTWORK, and IMAGE are scaled on seven-point semantic differential scales; PERSEX is scaled on a seven-point Likert scale (1-*Clearly No* to 7-*Clearly Yes*)	Factor Loading	Factor Loading	Factor Loading	Factor Loading
A_B .854	(AB1) Unfavorable / Favorable	.264	.191	**.768**	.102
	(AB2) Bad / Good	.253	.267	**.737**	.099
	(AB3) Unpleasant / Pleasant	.263	.215	**.781**	.109
	(AB4) Negative / Positive	.221	.228	**.703**	.251
Int_{WORK} .928	(INTWORK1) Would not seek out / Would seek out	**.772**	.238	.165	.240
	(INTWORK2) Not very likely / Very likely	**.777**	.285	.315	.128
	(INTWORK3) Improbable / Probable	**.787**	.300	.235	.073
	(INTWORK4) Would not consider / Would consider	**.816**	.239	.226	.118
	(INTWORK5) Unwilling / Willing	**.794**	.219	.317	.127
I_{MAGE} .868	(IMAGE1) Not credible / Credible	.283	**.594**	.129	.236
	(IMAGE2) Not prestigious / Prestigious	.201	**.733**	.120	.014
	(IMAGE3) Disreputable / Reputable	.265	**.708**	.251	.022
	(IMAGE4) Not trustworthy / Trustworthy	.366	**.630**	.155	.126
	(IMAGE5) Low quality / High quality	.033	**.781**	.217	.056
	(IMAGE6) Unreliable / Reliable	.169	**.749**	.139	.160
	(IMAGE7) Indecent / Virtuous	.381	**.546**	.251	.088
Per_{SEX} .731	(PERSEX1) Is this a case of sexual harassment?	.182	.023	.110	**.841**
	(PERSEX2) Is this a case of sexual harassment?	.192	.053	.225	**.761**
	(PERSEX3) Is this a case of sexual harassment?	.028	.177	.057	**.724**

A measurement model was estimated with LISREL 8.50 and the 19 items comprising the four scales. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for each construct, except I_{MAGE} (AVE=49.30%), exceed .50, which provides additional evidence of convergent validity. Also, the AVE values for each construct are greater than the squared correlations between each construct and the other constructs, except one correlation and the I_{MAGE} value (see Phi and Phi^2 matrices in Table 2), which offers further evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006). Estimation of the measurement model produced the following goodness-of-fit statistics: χ^2 (146)=319.61 (P<.00), comparative fit index (CFI)=.93, non-normed fit index (NNFI)=.92, goodness of fit index (GFI)=.87, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)=.049. In general, these fit statistics provide evidence of adequate model fit and the measures used to examine the studied constructs appear valid (Hair et al., 2006).

Structural Equation Model

The relationships shown in Figure 1 were tested using a structural equation model with LISREL 8.50. A covariance matrix and maximum likelihood estimation were used to estimate model parameters. Missing data were handled via pairwise deletion. The four constructs—*perceived sexual harassment, attitudes toward the brand, brand image*, and *intentions to work*—with three, four, seven, and five items, respectively, were included in the model. One additional parameter, beyond that explained by the common factor, is included in the model.

Model estimation produced the following goodness-of-fit statistics: χ^2(145)=270.26 (P<.00), CFI=.95, NNFI=.94, GFI=.88, and SRMR=.049. The ratio of χ^2 per degree of freedom is less than two, which indicates an acceptable fit of the model to the data (Hair et al., 2006). The CFI, NNFI, and SRMR statistics also indicate

a good model fit, but the GFI statistic implies only a marginal fit between the model and the data (Hair et al., 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Therefore, overall model fit is interpreted as acceptable, and the model cannot be rejected based on these data.

Table 2: *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Constructs	PERSEX	AB	INTWORK	IMAGE	Item Reliabilities	Delta (δ)
PERSEX1	.80				.640	.360
PERSEX2	.79				.624	.376
PERSEX3	.51				.260	.740
AB1		.77			.593	.407
AB2		.77			.593	.407
AB3		.80			.640	.360
AB4		.74			.548	.452
INTWORK1			.81		.656	.344
INTWORK2			.88		.774	.226
INTWORK3			.85		.723	.277
INTWORK4			.86		.740	.260
INTWORK5			.87		.757	.243
IMAGE1				.65	.423	.577
IMAGE2				.68	.462	.538
IMAGE3				.75	.563	.437
IMAGE4				.73	.533	.467
IMAGE5				.68	.462	.538
IMAGE6				.72	.518	.482
IMAGE7				.70	.490	.510
Average Variance Extracted	50.80%	59.35%	73.00%	49.30%		
Phi (Φ) Matrix						
PERSEX	1.00					
AB	-.46	1.00				
INTWORK	-.44	.71	1.00			
IMAGE	-.34	.66	.70	1.00		
Phi (Φ)² Matrix						
PERSEX	1.00					
AB	.21	1.00				
INTWORK	.19	.50	1.00			
IMAGE	.12	.44	.49	1.00		

The structural equation model's path coefficients are used to evaluate the hypotheses. The t statistic associated with all six path coefficients is significant at the $p<.05$ level or better, which implies that the hypotheses cannot be rejected (see Table 3). Specifically, prospective employees' perceived sexual harassment in a sales workplace was negatively related to their: attitudes toward the brand (H1), brand image (H2), and intentions to work for the firm (H3); prospective employees' brand image of a sales firm was positively related to both their attitudes toward the brand (H4), and intentions to work for this firm (H6); also, prospective employees' attitudes toward the service firm's brand were positively related to their intentions to work for

this firm (H5). Overall, the data support all six hypotheses and the structural equation model.

Table 3: *Hypotheses Tests*

Hypothesis	Structural Coefficient	*t*-statistic
H1: For prospective employees in a sales context, perceived sexual harassment in the workplace is negatively related to their attitudes toward the brand.	-.27	-3.55*
H2: For prospective employees in a sales context, perceived sexual harassment in the workplace is negatively related to their brand image of this firm.	-.34	-3.91*
H3: For prospective employees in a sales context, perceived sexual harassment in the workplace is negatively related to their intentions to work for this firm.	-.13	-2.03**
H4: Prospective employees' brand image of a sales firm is positively related to their attitudes toward the brand.	.57	6.49*
H5: Prospective employees' attitudes toward a sales firm's brand are positively related to their intentions to work for this firm.	.37	4.19*
H6: Prospective employee's brand image of a sales firm is positively related to their intentions to work for this firm.	.42	4.81*

*Significant at the $P<.01$ level, **Significant at the $P<.05$ level

Discussion

The severity of workplace sexual harassment may range from victims experiencing heightened levels of stress and uneasiness to firms incurring substantial financial litigation (Foy, 2000; Gervasio & Ruckdeschel, 1992; Schneider Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997). All factors in this range are detrimental to brand integrity, workplace efficiencies, and stakeholder value. Although the existing research on sexual harassment offers valuable insight into its consequences, additional research is needed to extend our understanding of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of workplace sexual harassment (Gilbert, 2005). Thus, we examine, for the first time, the effects of perceived sexual harassment, in a sales-oriented workplace, on attitudes toward the brand, brand image, and intentions to work, of prospective job applicants. The significant and direct negative effects found for each of these relationships, offers preliminary evidence that sexual harassment undermines brand development and recruiting. Hence, firms seeking to grow their brand's value and hire effective employees must be equipped to prevent and solve their sexual harassment quandaries.

The contribution of our study to knowledge of sexual harassment is three-fold. First, our model and data support the notion that perceived sexual harassment in the workplace has a direct negative effect on distinct attitudinal (i.e., A_B and I_{MAGE}) and behavioral (i.e., Int_{WORK}) brand-response constructs. By testing these effects, our findings meaningfully extend knowledge regarding the consequences to brands, caused by workplace sexual harassment (Gilbert, 2005; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Terpstra & Baker, 1986). Second, our model shows direct positive effects for both attitudes toward the brand and brand image on intentions to work. These findings

suggest that attitudinal responses to brands have the capacity to influence individuals' willingness to work for such companies. Third, we developed a scale that measures brand image and extend previously developed instruments used to measure perceived sexual harassment in the workplace.

Data collected when using these scales are reliable and, based on a factor analysis, evidence of convergent and discriminant validity exists for these measures. By using a new multi-item sexual harassment scale, our study provides a better understanding of individuals' perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995). As a result, employers may be better equipped to develop effective policy statements that dissuade workplace sexual harassment (York, 1989).

It is a well-documented fact that sexual harassment can lead to detrimental consequences for organizations (e.g., Wright & Bean, 1993). Our brand-specific results, which further corroborate these assumptions, show that Per_{SEX} negatively influences A_B, I_{MAGE}, and Int_{WORK}, of potential employees. Thus, to help preserve brand status in the marketplace and to effectively recruit and retain employees, organizations should stress that any form of sexual harassment can lead to workplace inefficiencies, suboptimal financial results, reduced stakeholder wealth, and litigation, to name a few. Additionally, our findings indicate that both A_B and I_{MAGE} correlate positively with Int_{WORK}. Thus, businesses seeking to acquire capable employees, should take the necessary steps to protect and ameliorate their brand's status in these individual's minds. By doing so, firms' recruiting and retention capacity should be strengthened (Sullivan, 2003). Lastly, our study finds a positive correlation between I_{MAGE} and A_B. Because more favorable customer attitudes lead to more favorable intentions and behaviors toward brands (e.g., Pope & Voges, 2000), organizations should engage in strategies that positively affect its image.

Implications

The way consumers respond to brands can have a significant effect on both business success and stakeholder value (Keller, 1993). Understanding factors that negatively affect brands should help businesses develop strategies to minimize such adverse consequences. Our study shows that perceived sexual harassment in the workplace has a negative effect on attitudes toward the brand, brand image, and intentions to work for prospective employees. Thus, an obvious implication of our findings is that businesses should engage in tactics that minimize sexual harassment behaviors within their organization. For example, a preventative, rather than a reactive (Woodford & Rissetto, 2004; Wright & Bean, 1993) approach to developing and executing sexual harassment policies, may reduce the likelihood of sexual harassment in the workplace, which should lead to more favorable attitudinal and behavioral responses toward the company and brand.

Our results show positive effects between attitudes toward the brand and brand image on intentions to work, and a positive effect between brand image and attitudes toward the brand. These findings imply that as attitudinal responses toward brands become more favorable, individuals are more likely to work for such organizations. In this sense, protecting and building an organization's image through strategies aimed at alleviating workplace sexual harassment, may lead to the attraction and retention of

qualified employees (Sullivan, 2003).

Educators play a pertinent role in developing competent employees. By incorporating sexual harassment content (e.g., its domain, its effects on individuals, organizations, and society) into course curriculum, instructors can help mold business students into effective managerial prospects (Swift & Denton, 1994).

Just as customers should be encouraged to provide feedback about their service experience and employee performance (Bitner et al., 1997), employees should be encouraged to discuss, in confidence, personal, ambient, and third-party sexual harassment as witnessed and/or experienced within their organization. Reflections on such experiences may help firms to avoid liability under *respondent superior,* which means that the employer knew or should have known of the sexual harassment and took no effective remedial action (Bundy v. Jackson, 1981). Such reflections may also help firms better understand what constitutes sexual harassment and its frequency within business. As a result, organizations may be in a better position to develop effective policy statements, which should discourage sexual harassment behaviors.

Creating awareness, avoiding litigation, protecting the brand, and generating workplace efficiencies are goals of a sexual harassment policy; its effectiveness is determined by employee knowledge and understanding of its principles and procedures (Stokes, Stewart-Belle & Barnes, 2000). An organization's culture is pivotal in developing an anti-sexual harassment environment. For example, a firm's zero tolerance culture should offer training in harassment prevention, take sexual harassment complaints seriously, carry out fair investigations when complaints arise, and appropriately punish offenders (Cava, 2001; Johnson, 2004; Stokes et al., 2000). Through effective leadership (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006), these policies must be communicated overtly (Creyer & Ross, 1997). For example, firms could offer on-line training sessions, in-house seminars, and distribute memos summarizing recent court decisions, where termination of employees and financial damages were recovered by plaintiffs (Acken, St. Pierre & Veglahn, 1991; Collins & Blodgett, 1981; Dunne & Lusch, 2008). By not disseminating to employees information pertaining to a sexual harassment policy, liability on behalf of the employer may result (e.g., Faragher v. City of Boca Raton, 1998). As harassment knowledge proliferates via overt communication, a zero tolerance mindset will become an integral part of a firm's culture, which should minimize workplace sexual harassment and increase overall brand value.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study is not without limitations. First, data was collected using college students at one university location in the southwest U.S. Additional data from actual job or experienced job seekers across different regions and cultures would be needed to establish the external validity of our findings (Winer, 1999). Second, the four scales we used for data collection may not be equally valid across all samples and exchange settings. This factor can affect the measurement properties of the constructs and their relationships with one another. Third, although the *perceived sexual harassment* and *brand image* scales we used demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity, mono-method bias (Cook & Campbell, 1979) may be evident based on our method of data

collection. Thus, additional quantitative and qualitative research is necessary to further validate these scales.

To broaden the scope of this study, other measures relevant to sexual harassment research, such as affect, coping, locus of control, moral intensity, self-blame, sex-role power, verbal sexual harassment, the Corporate Character Scale, and the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; Davies et al., 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gervasio & Ruckdeschel, 1992; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Malamut & Offermann, 2001; Popovich & Licata, 1987), could be added to our model. Additional research tools, such as interpretive, canonical, and/or cluster analyses, could be used to examine individual and organizational effects of perceived sexual harassment in the workplace (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Dan, Pinsof & Riggs, 1995; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). Longitudinal studies could be implemented to examine the lasting effect of perceived sexual harassment in the workplace on brand-response constructs (Lengnick-Hall, 1995). Moods can affect consumer decision-making (Bakamitsos & Siomkos, 2004), and examining how moods such as anger or depression moderate the relationships in our model would add insight into attitudinal and behavioral responses toward workplace sexual harassment (Terpstra & Baker, 1986).

Moreover, alternative vignettes that measure perceived sexual harassment could be developed. For example, vignettes could include additional information regarding ethical dimensions (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999), personal sexual harassment (Langhout et al., 2005), sex-role power (Gutek & Morasch, 1982), third party sexual harassment (Aalberts & Seidman, 1994; Fine et al., 1994), sexual hostility (Fitzgerald et al., 1988), different forms of harassment communication such as email or text messaging, and/or depict a male being sexually harassed. Lastly, factors related to corporate reputation pertain to more than financial performance measures. Additional research examining the effect of non-economic factors (e.g., corporate social performance, familiarity, personality) on brand and corporate image is needed (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, 1993; Turban & Greening, 1996). For example, because an employer's reputation matters to employees (Earle, 2003), prospective employees may be willing to work for an organization only if the image of the firm is consistent with their personality (Yi & La, 2006).

Conclusion

Although the image of a firm influences prospective employees' interest in pursuing employment with the firm and workplace sexual harassment influences brand image perceptions of the firm, there remains a paucity of research simultaneously examining sexual harassment effects (Gilbert, 2005; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000), recruitment processes (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Ryan & Tippins, 2004), and brand image influences and effects (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Gatewood et al., 2001). To help fill this research void, our study examined if a firm's reputation of sexual harassment influences prospective employees' brand image perception of the firm and their willingness to seek employment with the firm.

Our findings show that perceived sexual harassment in the workplace negatively affects attitudinal and behavioral brand-response constructs. Thus, an overt implication of our findings is that businesses should engage in tactics (e.g., internal brand-building strategies) that minimize sexual harassment behaviors within their organization. For example, when internal stakeholders understand, embrace, and execute organizational brand values (e.g., a zero tolerance policy regarding sexual harassment), the company has an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace and the brand has an opportunity to flourish (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006). In this sense, internal brand strategies are critical for overall business success. When communicated effectively (e.g., during the interview process, recruiter behavior, recruitment strategies) (Liden & Parsons, 1986; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Miller, 1983), internal branding may be used as a tool to attract qualified applicants by assuring prospective employees that the organization is a desirable place to work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), thereby leading to a sustainable competitive advantage (Kickul, 2001).

Our results also show positive effects between attitudes toward the brand and brand image on intentions to work. They also show a positive effect between brand image and attitudes toward the brand. Both factors indicate a positive relationship between attitudinal responses toward brands and the likelihood that prospective employees will seek employment with the firm. Thus, fostering an organization's image through internal brand strategies aimed at alleviating workplace sexual harassment, may lead to the attraction and retention of qualified employees (Sullivan, 2003).

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Appendix

Perceived Sexual Harassment Scale Items

Vignette 1 (PERSEX1):

On the inside of his office door, Mike, a sales manager, has a "revealing" women's calendar. The women in the calendar are beautiful and are wearing "skimpy" bikinis. Each time a worker enters his office they can't help but notice this calendar.

Is this a case of sexual harassment?

Clearly No   Clearly Yes

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Vignette 2 (PERSEX2):

John is known to view exotic websites of women while at work. For "fun," he will call over male colleagues to get their opinion of the website. Because of this activity, the women employees are beginning to feel awkward at work.

Is this a case of sexual harassment?

Clearly No   Clearly Yes

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Vignette 3 (PERSEX3):

Ted, a sales manager, and a new sales rep, Yvonne, have started dating. Since they began seeing each other, Yvonne has received merit increases and a recent promotion to sales trainer. Until this relationship began, Jessica was considered the "star" of the sales department.

Is this a case of sexual harassment?

Clearly No   Clearly Yes

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7