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## Responses of Female Undergraduates to Scenarios of Sexual Harassment by Male Professors and Teaching Assistants

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### Abstract

This study sought to identify some of the factors that lead to assertive responding to sexual harassment. Responses of 120 female undergraduates to hypothetical scenarios of sexual harassment by male professors or teaching assistants were investigated. Two situational variables (ambiguity of the behaviour and harasser status) and one individual difference variable (coping style) were examined. Participants completed a coping inventory and a questionnaire containing 1 of 4 harassment scenarios, with measures of affect, perceptions of the instructor, acknowledgment of the behaviour as sexual harassment, and behavioural responses at two stages. Less ambiguous harassment situations were associated with greater negative affect, acknowledgment of sexual harassment, and more assertive responding. Coping style, but not harasser status, was also related to response strategies.

### Résumé

Le but de cette étude était d'identifier certains facteurs menant à une attitude assertive face au harcèlement sexuel. On a étudié les réponses données par 120 étudiantes du 1er cycle à des scénarios fictifs de harcèlement sexuel mettant en scène des professeurs de sexe masculin ou des assistants à l'enseignement. Deux variables liées à la situation (ambiguïté du comportement et statut du harceleur) et une variable liée aux différences individuelles (style d'adaptation) ont été examinées. Les participantes ont répondu à un inventaire d'adaptation et rempli un questionnaire comprenant un des quatre scénarios de harcèlement, qui ont permis de mesurer l'affect, les perceptions du professeur, l'identification du comportement comme étant du harcèlement sexuel, et les réactions comportementales, en deux temps distincts. Les situations présentant une faible ambiguïté quant au comportement étaient liées à un affect négatif important, à la reconnaissance du harcèlement sexuel et à une réaction assertive marquée. Le style d'adaptation, mais non pas le statut du harceleur, a pu être associé aux stratégies de réaction.

The problem of sexual harassment within academic settings has been identified and examined in a number of psychological studies. Although contrapower harassment (harassment of superiors within an organization by subordinates, such as a student harassing a professor) is possible (Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Gold, & Ormerod, 1988; Matchen & DeSouza, 2000), it is more often the case that higher-ranking individuals use their position of power to obtain sexual favours from lower-ranking individuals, rather than the other way around. According to Dziech and Weiner (1984), between 20 and 30% of women are subjected to some form of sexual harassment by a professor during their university career. The existence of sexual harassment in academia, and the seriousness of its consequences, interferes with the educational and career-building pursuits of women. Even harassment that is infrequent or apparently innocuous can have serious negative effects on victims' psychological well-being (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Moreover, sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is prohibited by law. Even so, such behaviour persists, and victims often do little to end the harassment.

The main focus of this research is on the behavioural responses of victims of sexual harassment. How victims react may depend on how they think and feel about what has happened to them, but it is their actions that can have the greatest effect on both the outcome of individual cases as well as on the general problem of this type of discrimination for other women. A wide range of behaviours may follow a sexually harassing incident, from ignoring the incident to lodging a formal complaint. Although recent evidence indicates that responses to sexual harassment are becoming more direct in some situations (e.g., confronting the harasser, Gruber & Smith, 1995; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1995), formal complaints are still relatively rare (Brooks & Perot, 1991). A serious consequence of the low rates of reporting behaviour is that harassers are often not held accountable for their actions. Because they suffer little as a result of their actions, they may harass again (Pyke, 1996). If harassers who

abuse their power are stopped and/or punished, other potential harassers may rethink their intentions. In order to understand how the problem of sexual harassment might be reduced, therefore, it is important to study the behaviour of the victims and the factors that encourage or inhibit particular kinds of actions (Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997). Following is a description of the process of responding to harassment and a brief summary of some of the factors involved in acknowledgment of and responses to sexual harassment. In addition to the factors that have been related to responses to sexual harassment (i.e., situational ambiguity and status of the harasser), one new factor, that of the victim's dispositional coping style, will also be examined.

#### *Responding to Sexual Harassment*

Although it is important to study affective and cognitive reactions to sexual harassment, a focus on the behaviour of its victims is equally important. It is the actions of the victims that may ultimately lead to a change in the situation, and possibly to a reduction of the overall problem. The type of behavioural response depends first on whether or not the victim acknowledges that she has been sexually harassed, which is due in large part to the severity of the harassing behaviour. Unless the harassment is acknowledged, the victim is unlikely to respond actively, and the perpetrator will not be dealt with adequately. Although sexual harassment is not socially acceptable and the way that people respond appears to be becoming more assertive, it is still astounding that so little of it gets reported. For example, Reilly, Lott, and Gallogly (1986) found in their survey of university students that of the 38 women who gave details of incidents that had occurred to them, only one reported the incident to the person's supervisor, and only two reported it to their advisor, another professor, or their employer. Twenty-three of the 38 women chose to ignore the behaviour or do nothing.

In Fitzgerald, Shullman, et al.'s (1988) study, between 50 and 76% of the female graduate and undergraduate students at two universities indicated that they had experienced, on at least one occasion, some form of sexual harassment. Most of these consisted of instances of gender harassment and seduction. Yet only 3% of these students had reported the situation. Reasons given by those who did not try to report the harassment included thinking that they would not be believed, not wanting to look like a troublemaker, and dealing with the situation themselves because it was not serious enough to report. Victims also may choose to ignore the harassment or try to avoid the harasser because of the higher costs (acade-

mic or psychological) associated with more direct behaviours (see Lalonde, 1997). Marin and Guadagno (1999) suggest that victims may be reluctant to label an incident as sexual harassment and to report it for fear of negative evaluation from others, both men and women.

Before taking action against the perpetrator, victims want to know that what they have experienced is indeed sexual harassment. Some of the actions that they may take, such as talking to a friend or family member, or seeking information and advice, may not appear to be assertive. These actions, however, may be the first step in a process of responding to the situation, or what Lalonde and Cameron (1994) describe as preparatory behaviours. Moreover, information seeking is important, given that Reilly et al. (1986) found that only about 14% of their participants (male and female undergraduate and graduate students) knew the official steps to take in reporting an incident of sexual harassment. These initial actions, therefore, may be required before the behaviour is acknowledged and labeled as one of harassment. Responding to harassment can be seen as a process in which early actions may appear passive, whereas later actions may be more direct and aggressive, with the intention of actually changing the situation. Furthermore, rather than a one-time occurrence, sexual harassment often continues over a period of time. When ignoring the situation (or another relatively passive response) is ineffective and the harassing behaviour persists, the victim may then resort to more active attempts to end the harassment. In the current study, responses to harassment will be examined in two stages: initial responses and responses after getting advice from a sexual harassment information office.

#### *Ambiguity of Harassment*

There is considerable ambiguity involved in the identification and labeling of all types of discrimination. In the case of harassment, a woman might ask, is this harassment or is he just really friendly and informal? This uncertainty has been referred to as an attributional ambiguity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major & Crocker, 1993). To further compound the ambiguity of harassment is the ambiguity of the term. Individuals differ in the behaviours that they believe constitute sexual harassment. Sexual harassment not only includes direct behaviour, such as sexual attention or pressure, but also refers to indirect behaviour of a more general nature, such as gender harassment. The verbal behaviour of others (e.g., a professor's derogatory remarks toward women) may not be of a personal nature, but helps create an intimidating atmosphere that may interfere with learning and that can be psychologically

harmful (Mazer & Percival, 1989). Mazer and Percival, however, found that more than half of their respondents (both male and female) did not consider sexual jokes and obscene language to constitute sexual harassment. Similarly, a study by Samoluk and Pretty (1994) showed that women were less convinced that environmental types of sexual harassment, compared to interpersonal types, actually constitute sexual harassment. It has been found that although gender harassment can legally be considered a form of sexual harassment, and is included in sexual harassment policies, individuals often fail to recognize such forms of behaviour as constituting sexual harassment (Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Padgitt & Padgitt, 1986).

Empirical studies also have demonstrated a failure to directly acknowledge or label an incident as one of harassment. Jaschik and Fretz (1991) had female participants view a videotape of a male teaching assistant (TA) evaluating a female undergraduate student's paper while exhibiting sexually harassing behaviour. Participants were then asked two questions. An indirect question asked for a description of the TA's behaviour, and a direct question asked whether or not the TA's conduct showed sexual harassment. Answers to the indirect question indicated that although respondents clearly disapproved of the TA's behaviour, only 3% actually used the term sexual harassment. For the direct question, 98% answered "yes." These results suggest that women are unlikely to label a behaviour as sexual harassment unless prompted, even though they agree that the same behaviour is indeed sexual harassment when directly asked. Because women often do not explicitly acknowledge sexually harassing behaviour, even though it is perceived as a negative experience, it is likely to go unreported.

Why is it that individuals may experience more sexual harassment than they tend to perceive? Even when sexual intent is perceived in the harasser's behaviour, students rarely see themselves as having been harassed or victimized (Dziech & Weiner, 1984). The discrepancy between perception and labeling is largely due to the ambiguous nature of harassing behaviour. Sexual harassment of an implicit nature occurs much more frequently than that of an explicit nature (demands for sex are stated directly), leaving many situations open to alternative interpretations (Garlick, 1994). Gutek and Koss (1993), for example, report that a woman may interpret the situation as one of "horseplay." The distinction between behaviours that constitute sexual harassment and those intended only as immediacy behaviours or flirtations may be vague.

Garlick (1994) studied ambiguous instructor behav-

ours by examining immediacy behaviours, which he defined as "those behaviours that function to increase or decrease the physical and psychological distance between people" (p.137). Some of the kinds of behaviours used were touching, maintaining close proximity, invitations to interact outside of class, and discussing things of a personal nature that are not relevant to the course. Compared to men, women did not find the ambiguous behaviours to be as acceptable and were not as comfortable with them. LaRocca and Kromrey (1999) also found that compared to men, women perceived a perpetrator's actions as less appropriate in an ambiguous sexual harassment scenario. In another study by Marks and Nelson (1993), scenarios were used in which touching of a student by a professor was manipulated. Potentially harassing behaviour was rated as more inappropriate when there was touching.

According to Rowland, Crisler, and Cox (1982), flirting between faculty and students is unethical and considered sexual harassment when the student feels compelled to participate in this kind of behaviour. Any behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwelcome and makes someone uncomfortable, however, can be considered sexual harassment, regardless of any explicit or implicit reward or punishment. Even in the absence of obvious consequences, an instructor's behaviour toward a student may foster a negative or hostile learning environment. The student's personal interpretation of the situation and reactions to it, therefore, are important in the distinction between harassing and nonharassing behaviour.

Baker, Terpstra, and Larntz (1990) asked respondents to describe how they would react to hypothetical scenarios depicting a range of sexually harassing behaviours and to indicate whether they perceived each behaviour to be sexually harassing. The more severe the incident, the more assertive were the reactions. It can probably be assumed that participants react more assertively to behaviours that they more readily acknowledge as constituting sexual harassment. Sullivan and Bybee (1987) used hypothetical scenarios and found that the likelihood of reporting sexual harassment increased with the severity of the situation, and that the ambiguity of less severe situations resulted in less reporting. Fear of not being believed, lack of faith in the system's effectiveness in dealing with complaints, and fear of the reporting procedure itself also resulted in less reporting.

#### *Status of the Harasser*

Gruber and Smith (1995) found that women's responses in the workplace were more assertive when the harasser was not a supervisor, and that women were

more likely to quit their jobs when the harasser was a supervisor compared to a co-worker. The status of the harasser is important as an indication of the power he has over the victim. Incidents of sexual harassment can occur between those of equal status (one student harassing another), or between two people at different status levels (an instructor harassing a student, or vice versa). It has been shown that when the harasser has a higher status, the behaviour is more likely to be labeled as sexual harassment (Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Popovich, Licata, Nokovich, Martelli, & Zoloty, 1987; Stockdale, Vaux, & Cashin, 1995).

Within many academic settings, students encounter not only peers of equal status, but authority figures having differential status. Many of their encounters take place not only with professors, but also with teaching assistants (TAs). TAs clearly have a higher status than undergraduate students, but they have much less power than professors. The age difference between TAs and undergraduate students is usually much less than the age difference between professors and students. Students may be more likely to view a TA as a potential social partner, which may counteract the expected negative affective reactions and judgments of the behaviour. Undergraduate students may be more likely to drop the course or ignore the behaviour, rather than confront or complain about the harasser, when a harassing episode involves a professor rather than a teaching assistant. Students may perceive faculty members to be more protected by the institution than they perceive TAs to be. The current study will examine the potential effects of the differential status of TAs and professors.

In addition to situational factors such as the ambiguity of harassment and the status of the harasser, individual differences may also influence behaviour in response to sexual harassment. One individual difference variable that seems quite relevant is an individual's coping style.

#### *Coping Style*

The notion of coping has often been discussed in the area of sexual harassment. Typically, coping has been conceptualized in terms of the responses to harassment (e.g., Chan, Tang, & Chan, 1999; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1997; Stockdale, 1998). Coping can also be conceptualized within the rich personality tradition that has been used to examine stress and its management (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). How individuals typically cope with stressful situations might also be related to the way they respond to potentially sexually harassing behaviour, regardless of whether or not they label it as such.

Endler and Parker (1990b) have described three

basic coping strategies. Problem-focused coping refers to a task orientation aimed at solving the problem. Emotion-focused coping refers to a self-oriented style of coping aimed at reducing the stress; this style includes emotional responses, self-preoccupation, and fantasizing reactions. Avoidance coping can include either task-oriented behaviours (distracting oneself by engaging in other tasks) or person-oriented behaviours (social diversion – seeking the company of others). The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1990a) was used in this study to assess individual coping styles. This scale has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of coping style (Endler & Parker, 1994). The CISS has previously been used to look at the relationship between coping style and responses to specific stressful situations (i.e., adjusting to university life, and anticipating an upcoming examination; Endler & Parker, 1994), and has been used with various populations, for example, doctors (Deary et al., 1996), undergraduate students (Higgins & Endler, 1995; Weiser, Endler, & Parker, 1991), and athletes (Grove & Heard, 1997).

While styles of coping have been examined in relation to sexual victimization and distress symptomatology (Proulx, Koverola, Federowicz, & Kral, 1995), coping styles have never been directly related to responses to sexual harassment. In the present study, it is expected that task, or problem-focused, coping will be associated with actively trying to resolve the situation, and that emotion coping and avoidance coping will be associated with passive behaviours that may help to reduce the stress, but do not solve the problem.

How coping style might interact with the ambiguity of the harassment and the status of the harasser in their influence on responses to the harassment will also be explored. In their discussion of coping and personality, Suls and David (1996) have proposed that "strong" situations (i.e., those having clear expectations) should elicit little variability in the responses of individuals. "Weak" situations (i.e., not having clear normative standards), however, should elicit greater variability in responses and offer personality variables such as coping styles greater predictive ability. Although an ambiguous harassment situation will not have clear normative standards of response, there is no evidence to indicate that an unambiguous harassment situation is associated with clear behavioural expectations.

#### *Present Study*

Given that women are more often the targets of sexual harassment than are men, this study focused only on female respondents. The effects of two situational factors, ambiguity and harasser status, on responses to

sexual harassment in an academic setting will be examined. Situational ambiguity was manipulated by having the instructor verbally imply that participating in more informal activities may bring a reward in one condition, but not in the other. The manipulation of status differentiated between two types of higher status: a professor harassing a student and a TA harassing a student. A variety of responses were examined (acknowledgment, affect, perceptions of harasser), but the primary focus was on the behavioural preferences of the target of harassment. The role of an individual's coping style was examined in terms of its relationship with behavioural preferences and its interaction with situational factors. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that looks at the relationship between coping style and responses to sexual harassment.

The research strategy involved the use of a hypothetical scenario, in which the participant is the recipient of the sexually harassing behaviour. Although the use of scenarios, rather than respondents' actual experiences, threatens the external validity of the study's results (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993), it was decided that this would be the most suitable approach due to the sensitive nature of this topic and the desire to manipulate situational variables and examine causal relationships. Many researchers have used hypothetical scenarios to study responses to sexual harassment (e.g., Baker et al., 1990; Jones & Remland, 1992) as well as to other kinds of discrimination (Lalonde, Majumder, & Parris, 1995). Finally, whereas previous studies have looked at only one set of responses to a scenario, this study looked at responses in two stages in order to capture the process of responding that one might go through following a sexual harassment incident.

Following are the hypotheses that were tested in this study:

*Ambiguity.* The unambiguous condition will be associated with more negative affect and more negative descriptions of the instructor's behaviour than the ambiguous condition. Compared to the more ambiguous condition, the unambiguous condition will also be associated with a greater acknowledgment of sexual harassment, as well as more assertive responding (rather than ignoring the incident) (e.g., Baker et al., 1990; Sullivan & Bybee, 1987).

*Harasser status.* Although many studies have examined the role of status in responses to sexual harassment (e.g., Gruber & Smith, 1995; Stockdale et al., 1995), these studies have compared equal status individuals to higher status individuals as perpetrators of

harassment. In the present study, however, both harassers are of higher status than the victim, which has never before been studied. It is hypothesized that situations involving a TA as the harasser will result in less negative affect and will be perceived less negatively than situations involving a professor as the harasser. Participants in the TA conditions also were expected to be less likely to acknowledge having been sexually harassed, to label the behaviour as sexual harassment, and to engage in assertive responding behaviour in comparison to participants in the professor conditions.

*Coping style.* Individual coping styles will be related to behavioural responses. It is expected that participants with higher scores on the task coping style will be more likely to engage in assertive responding behaviour (i.e., confronting the instructor, reporting the incident), and that participants with higher scores on the emotion coping style and on the avoidance coping style will be more likely to engage in passive responding (i.e., doing nothing, avoiding the instructor). No a priori predictions are made regarding the interaction of coping styles with the situational variables of ambiguity and harasser status.

*Relationship between affect, acknowledgment and behaviour.* Greater negative affect and acknowledgment of the instructor's behaviour as sexual harassment will be associated with more assertive responding behaviour. Also, a significant relationship is expected between negative affect and acknowledgment (e.g., Stockdale et al., 1995).

#### METHOD

##### *Participants*

Participants were 120 female undergraduate students from three Canadian universities (93 from York University – recruited mostly from classes, 25 from McMaster University – recruited from a student dormitory, and 2 from the University of Calgary). All three universities have a sexual harassment complaint office on campus. The mean age was 21.8 years ( $SD = 3.0$ ), ranging from 19 to 50 years. Fifty-nine percent were enrolled in a psychology program, with the remaining students in various arts, science, business, and education programs. Most of the students were in their third year of study. They were each paid \$7 for their participation.

##### *Procedure*

Each participant received a coping measure and a questionnaire that included the manipulations and primary dependent variables.<sup>1</sup> To balance the order in

which these measures were completed, half of the participants completed the coping measure before the questionnaire, and the other half completed the coping measure after the questionnaire. This was to determine whether responding first to the scenario had any influence on the various coping style scores, and vice versa. The coping measure (described below) was intended to measure how people generally cope with stressful situations, and not how they would cope with the specific situation presented here. Very few order effects were found, and none were particularly meaningful.

*Coping Measure.* The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1990a) was used to measure individual coping styles. The CISS consists of 48 scaled items (from 1 – “not at all” to 5 – “very much”) and measures three types of coping styles, with 16 items on each subscale: task oriented (use of cognitive or behavioural problem solving techniques,  $\alpha = .92$ ); emotion oriented (use of emotional responses, self-preoccupation, or fantasy,  $\alpha = .90$ ); and avoidance coping (reliance on social support systems or distraction through other activities,  $\alpha = .85$ ). These coefficient alphas are based on the current sample. Each subscale has a possible range of 16 to 80. Means and standard deviations for the CISS subscales are as follows: Task ( $M = 58.36$ ,  $SD = 10.66$ ), Emotion ( $M = 49.72$ ,  $SD = 12.24$ ), and Avoidance ( $M = 45.69$ ,  $SD = 11.00$ ). These mean scores are comparable to those obtained with a large normative sample ( $n = 771$ ) of female undergraduates (Endler & Parker, 1990a): Task ( $M = 55.11$ ,  $SD = 10.25$ ), Emotion ( $M = 48.20$ ,  $SD = 11.30$ ), and Avoidance ( $M = 47.27$ ,  $SD = 10.78$ ). No differences in CISS scores were found across conditions.

*Questionnaire.* The instructions at the beginning of the questionnaire explained that the purpose of the study was to examine interactions in an academic environment, without mention of sexual harassment. The first section of the questionnaire contained the harassment scenario. Each participant randomly received 1 of 4

possible scenarios. In all conditions, the participant was instructed to imagine that she personally experienced the situation. The scenario described a meeting between a student and an instructor, the purpose of which was to discuss the student’s paper. The manipulation of status was achieved by varying the power differential between the student and the harasser (professor or TA). The manipulation of ambiguity was achieved by the inclusion (in the unambiguous condition) of an implication that participating in sexual activities might bring a reward. The scenario was as follows:

Put yourself in the following situation. You are taking a first-year introductory course, and your [professor is an amicable, attractive man who appears to be in his mid-forties/ TA is an amicable, attractive man who appears to be in his mid-twenties]. He compliments you on a paper, suggests that he could help you improve your work even further, and offers to meet with you in his office to discuss your paper. He has always been friendly and helpful in the past, and you think this is a good idea and agree to meet with him. When you arrive, he welcomes you and asks you to shut the door and to have a seat. He is very informal and calls you by your first name. He tells you that he enjoys having such a bright and attractive young woman as yourself in his class, and that he looks forward to working with you on a one-to-one basis. He says that he recognizes the extensive research that you put into the paper and the strong arguments that are presented. He senses, however, that you are trying to be too objective in the presentation of the material and removing your personal views from the subject. He jokes and says that you seem to be holding back in your personal interactions in the same way that you hold back in your writing. While talking with you he sometimes touches your knee and your shoulder in a casual way. Sensing that you are uncomfortable with his behaviour, he apologizes and tells you that you shouldn’t be so shy, and that it is just his way of expressing himself when he is comfortable. [He then suggests, putting his hand on your knee, that if you were to hold back less during your individual meetings you may be able to obtain a better grade in the course.] *This last sentence is omitted in the two ambiguous situations.*

1 The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ-E; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Gelfand, 1993) was also administered to participants to assess prior experience with sexually harassing behaviour. The SEQ-E was administered last for all participants. There was a very restricted range of scores with the exception of one outlier. As a result of the weak correlations found between the SEQ-E scales and the dependent measures, as well as the lack of significant results in regression analyses, the SEQ-E was not considered to be an important factor in determining responses to sexual harassment in the context of the present study.

The questionnaire was divided into two stages of responding. The first stage assessed affective reactions to the scenario (based on the emotional terms and scales used by Watson and Clark, 1992), perceptions of the harasser’s behaviour, preferences for 12 different behavioural responses (see Table 1), and acknowledgment of the behaviour as sexual harassment. Both open-ended questions and 5-point rating scales (from 1 – “not at all likely” to 5 – “very likely”)

Table 1  
Correlations Between Affect and Behavioural Responses

Initial Responses	Negative Affect	Positive Affect	Fear	Guilt	Determined
Not give this meeting much thought	-.38**	.19	-.39**	-.11	.11
Do nothing	-.39**	.16	-.02	.02	-.38**
Ignore the instructor's behaviour	-.41**	.17	-.17	-.12	-.25*
Talk to a friend	.04	-.08	.08	.03	-.20
Talk to a family member	.33**	-.20	.19	.08	.15
Avoid this instructor	.41**	-.44**	.52**	.40**	-.28*
Confront the instructor	.41**	-.04	-.03	-.02	.41**
Do as the instructor suggests	-.35**	.33**	-.14	-.10	-.06
Drop the course/switch tutorials	.21	-.08	.20	.24*	-.14
Report to dept. chair/course director	.42**	-.03	-.04	-.08	.46**
Go to SHEACC for advice	.47**	-.02	.05	.02	.40**
Go to SHEACC to report	.40**	.05	-.02	-.08	.48**

Responses After Going to SHEACC	Negative Affect	Positive Affect	Fear	Guilt	Determined
Do nothing	-.33**	.08	-.03	.09	-.35**
Speak to instructor yourself	-.08	.33*	-.24*	-.14	.24*
Write a letter to instructor	.16	-.02	-.06	-.04	.16
Have SHEACC write a letter to instructor	.36**	-.18	.20	.13	.01
Have SHEACC help change courses	.26*	-.19	.47**	.31**	-.10
Have SHEACC speak to the instructor	.22	-.23	.24*	.10	.03
Make a formal complaint	.37**	-.14	.01	-.13	.32**

\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ .

were used. The open-ended questions asked how the participant would feel, what she would think of the instructor's behaviour, what she would do while still in the office, and what she would do once she had left the office. Responses to these questions were used in a descriptive manner (i.e., frequencies of common responses are reported).

*Affective Responses.* In order to reduce the number of affective ratings to a smaller number of scales, the 28 emotion terms were analyzed using a principal components factor analysis. The six factors having eigenvalues greater than 1 in the initial solution were varimax rotated. Factor 1 was labeled *negative affect*, and was composed of betrayed, angry, upset, abused, offended, distressed, hostile, and irritable ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Factor 2 was labeled *positive affect*, and was composed of interested, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, proud, flattered, and active ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Factor 3 was labeled *fearful*, and was composed of jittery, nervous, afraid, scared, and comfortable ( $\alpha = .81$ ; comfortable had a negative loading on this factor, and was reverse coded prior to any further analysis). Factor 4 was labeled *guilty*, and was composed of confused, ashamed,

depressed, and guilty ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Factor 5 was labeled *determined*, and was composed of determined and strong ( $\alpha = .67$ ). Factor 6 was labeled *arousal*, and was composed of alert and attentive ( $\alpha = .68$ ). This latter factor did not relate to any of the primary measures and was omitted from the results. Factor loadings for each variable were all greater than .5.

*Perceptions of the Instructor's Behaviour.* In order to reduce the number of instructor ratings to a smaller number of scales, the 10 descriptive terms were analyzed using a principal components factor analysis. Three factors were extracted and varimax rotated on the basis of eigenvalues greater than 1 in the initial solution. Factor 1 was labeled *positive description*, and was composed of sociable, friendly, encouraging, and flattering ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Factor 2 was labeled *negative description*, and was composed of offensive, extreme, threatening, and unusual ( $\alpha = .71$ ). Factor 3 was labeled *ethical*, but was not examined any further because of its poor internal consistency ( $\alpha = .34$ ). Again, factor loadings for each variable were all greater than .5.

In the second stage of responding, regardless of the

answers given in the previous stage, the respondent was to suppose that she had spoken to a friend about the incident. The friend is of the opinion that the behaviour constituted sexual harassment, suggests that she do something about it, and tells her about the Sexual Harassment Education and Complaint Centre (SHEACC) on campus. The student decides to go to SHEACC to speak with an advisor, who tells her that what happened was indeed sexual harassment. There was a list of seven behavioural options (see Table 1), and 5-point rating scales on which the student was to indicate how likely she would be to choose each one. Behavioural options at both stages were selected in conjunction with an advisor from the university's Sexual Harassment Education and Complaint Centre (who agreed that the scenarios in all conditions were realistic and did constitute sexual harassment) in order to reflect the real options of students at both stages, and as a result options differ from one stage to the next. The behaviours that were selected include responses from the three categories of behaviour identified by Frieze and Bookwala (1996) in their discussion of coping with traumatic victimization (i.e., self-help, informal assistance, and formal help).

#### RESULTS

All variables were examined in the overall design of the study: Ambiguity (ambiguous vs. unambiguous situation)  $\times$  Status (professor vs. TA). Degrees of freedom differ slightly from analysis to analysis because of some missing observations. Analyses are based on responses to the rating scales, rather than the open-ended questions.

##### *Manipulation Checks for Ambiguity*

Two items assessing acknowledgment and perception of sexual harassment were analyzed in the overall design. For the degree to which the participant would think she had been sexually harassed, there was a significant effect for ambiguity,  $F(1,111) = 19.16, p = .000$ . There was also a significant effect for ambiguity for the degree to which the participant would label the behaviour as sexual harassment,  $F(1,112) = 21.70, p = .000$ . As expected, those in the unambiguous condition were more likely to think they had been sexually harassed ( $M = 3.73$ ) and label the behaviour as sexual harassment ( $M = 4.05$ ) than those in the ambiguous condition ( $M = 2.87$  and  $M = 3.17$ ). No other effects for these items were obtained. Participants also were asked whether the professor or TA had suggested a change in behaviour in order to obtain a better grade in the course. When the situation was unambiguous, 55 of 60 answered yes; when the situation was ambiguous, 21 of 59 answered yes. Although participants

were more likely to answer yes to this question in the unambiguous condition ( $\chi^2 = 4.898, p < .05$ ), this result suggests that there may have been an implicit message for some respondents in the ambiguous condition.

##### *Participant Affect*

The six affective measures were separately analyzed in the overall design of the study. Significant effects were found only for the negative affect measure, which was associated with a significant ambiguity effect,  $F(1,112) = 13.28, p = .000$ . Negative affect was higher for participants in the unambiguous condition ( $M = 3.58$ ) compared to participants in the ambiguous condition ( $M = 2.96$ ).

*Correlational analyses.* As predicted, participants reporting more negative affect were more likely to feel that they had been sexually harassed ( $r = .61, p < .001$ ) and to label the behaviour as harassment ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ).

Correlations also were calculated between the six affect scales and each of the behavioural responses, and are presented in Table 1. A conservative alpha value was used ( $p < .001$ ) given the number of correlations that were computed ( $n = 114$ ). The best predictor of behaviour preferences was *negative affect* with 10 of 12 significant correlations for Stage 1 responses and 3 of 7 significant correlations for Stage 2 responses. For Stage 1 responses, participants scoring higher on negative affect were more likely to indicate that they would talk to a family member, avoid the instructor, confront the instructor, report the incident to the department chair, go to SHEACC for advice, and report the incident to SHEACC; they would also be less likely to do nothing, not give the meeting much thought, ignore the instructor's behaviour, and do as the instructor suggests. For Stage 2, participants scoring higher on negative affect were more likely to get SHEACC to write a letter to the instructor and to make a formal complaint, and were less likely to do nothing.

Similarly for *determined affect*, the more passive behaviours tended to be negatively correlated with feeling determined, and the more active behaviours tended to be positively correlated with feeling determined. Participants scoring higher on determined affect were more likely to indicate that they would confront the instructor, report the incident to the chair, go to SHEACC for advice, and report the incident to SHEACC at Stage 1, and make a formal complaint at Stage 2. Those with higher determined affect scores were also less likely to do nothing at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. The remaining four affect measures were associated with two or fewer significant correlations for behaviours at each stage.

Table 2  
Overall Behavioural Preferences and as a Function of the Ambiguity Manipulation

	Overall (N = 115)	Ambiguous (N = 59)	Unambiguous (N = 56)	F
<b>Initial Responses</b>				
Talk to a friend	4.57 <sub>a</sub>	4.49 <sub>a</sub>	4.66 <sub>a</sub>	.86
Avoid this instructor	3.63 <sub>b</sub>	3.41 <sub>b</sub>	3.88 <sub>ab</sub>	4.29*
Talk to a family member	3.17 <sub>bc</sub>	2.88 <sub>bcd</sub>	3.48 <sub>bc</sub>	4.09*
Do nothing	2.78 <sub>cd</sub>	3.10 <sub>bc</sub>	2.45 <sub>def</sub>	6.32**
Go to SHEACC for advice	2.62 <sub>cd</sub>	2.25 <sub>cdef</sub>	3.00 <sub>bcd</sub>	7.33**
Report to dept. chair/course director	2.50 <sub>d</sub>	1.97 <sub>ef</sub>	3.05 <sub>bcd</sub>	18.37***
Go to SHEACC to report	2.35 <sub>de</sub>	1.88 <sub>ef</sub>	2.84 <sub>cde</sub>	13.75***
Ignore the instructor's behaviour	2.31 <sub>de</sub>	2.63 <sub>bcd</sub>	1.98 <sub>ef</sub>	6.52**
Confront the instructor	2.22 <sub>de</sub>	1.80 <sub>ef</sub>	2.66 <sub>cdef</sub>	15.69***
Drop the course/switch tutorials	1.86 <sub>ef</sub>	1.54 <sub>f</sub>	2.20 <sub>def</sub>	8.44**
Not give this meeting much thought	1.84 <sub>ef</sub>	2.07 <sub>def</sub>	1.61 <sub>f</sub>	5.59*
Do as the instructor suggests	1.47 <sub>f</sub>	1.56 <sub>f</sub>	1.38 <sub>f</sub>	.99
<b>Responses after going to SHEACC</b>				
Have SHEACC help change courses	3.28 <sub>a</sub>	3.20 <sub>a</sub>	3.35 <sub>a</sub>	.25
Have SHEACC speak to the instructor	2.90 <sub>ab</sub>	2.80 <sub>ab</sub>	3.00 <sub>ab</sub>	.63
Do nothing	2.50 <sub>bc</sub>	2.74 <sub>ab</sub>	2.24 <sub>bc</sub>	4.45*
Have SHEACC write a letter to instructor	2.44 <sub>bc</sub>	2.36 <sub>bc</sub>	2.53 <sub>bc</sub>	.59
Make a formal complaint	2.16 <sub>c</sub>	1.83 <sub>c</sub>	2.49 <sub>bc</sub>	7.71**
Write a letter to instructor	2.13 <sub>c</sub>	1.92 <sub>c</sub>	2.35 <sub>bc</sub>	3.96*
Speak to instructor yourself	2.03 <sub>c</sub>	1.92 <sub>c</sub>	2.16 <sub>c</sub>	1.26

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Note. Means in the same column that do not share a common subscript are significantly different at  $p < .01$  using Tukey's HSD procedure. Means are based on 5-point scales (1 = "not at all likely" to 5 = "very likely").

#### *Perceptions of Instructor's Behaviour*

The positive and negative descriptions were analyzed in the overall design. Positive description was associated with significant main effects for ambiguity,  $F(1,111) = 5.91, p = .017$ , and for status,  $F(1,111) = 5.35, p = .023$ . Descriptions were more positive for those in the ambiguous condition ( $M = 2.02$ ) than for those in the unambiguous condition ( $M = 1.64$ ), and were more positive when the instructor was a TA ( $M = 2.01$ ) as compared to a professor ( $M = 1.65$ ); all of the positive description means were below the midpoint of 3. Negative description was associated with a significant effect for ambiguity,  $F(1,112) = 5.62, p = .019$ . Descriptions of the instructor were more negative for the unambiguous condition ( $M = 3.83$ ) than for the ambiguous condition ( $M = 3.43$ ).

#### *Behaviour Preferences*

Behaviour preferences were examined in the overall design. The means associated with these effects, in order from most to least preferred responses regardless of condition, are presented in the first column of Table 2. When examining each of the behaviours separately in a series of Ambiguity (2)  $\times$  Status (2) ANOVAs, the most consistent effect was for ambiguity, which

had an effect on 10 of the 12 initial responses and 3 of the 7 responses after going to SHEACC. Few effects were associated with the status variable; the only significant status main effect was for the behaviour "have SHEACC help you to drop or change courses/switch tutorials,"  $F(1,108) = 6.91, p = .01$ . Participants in situations involving a TA were more likely to switch tutorials ( $M = 3.65$ ) than were participants to drop or change courses in situations involving a professor ( $M = 2.92$ ). Ambiguity effects are described in the next set of analyses.

In order to more closely examine potential differences in behaviour preferences (e.g., talking to friends vs. going to SHEACC), responses to the 12 initial behaviours were examined in a 2  $\times$  2  $\times$  12 (Ambiguity  $\times$  Status  $\times$  Behaviour) mixed model ANOVA treating Behaviour as the repeated measure. In addition to the ambiguity effects that were reported in the previous set of analyses, a significant behaviour effect,  $F(11,1177) = 51.57, p = .000$ , and a behaviour by ambiguity interaction,  $F(11,1177) = 7.22, p = .000$ , were obtained. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests, shown in the first column of Table 2, revealed that overall, talking to a friend about what happened was the most preferred behaviour, and was significantly different (at  $p < .01$ )

from almost all of the other 11 initial responses for both the ambiguous and unambiguous conditions. Avoiding the instructor was the second most likely response for both ambiguity conditions, and it was significantly different from the majority of the remaining responses. The next group included such behaviours as doing nothing, going to SHEACC for advice, reporting the incident to the department chair/course director, going to SHEACC to report the incident, ignoring the instructor's behaviour, and confronting the instructor. The least likely behaviour for both ambiguity conditions was doing as the instructor suggested.

The behaviour by ambiguity interaction can clearly be identified when examining the univariate effects for ambiguity in Table 2. When the situation was ambiguous, respondents showed a greater preference for doing nothing and ignoring the instructor's behaviour; when the situation was unambiguous, however, respondents were more likely to prefer going to the Sexual Harassment Centre for advice, reporting the incident to the department chair or to the Sexual Harassment Centre, confronting the instructor, or dropping the course.

For the responses after going to SHEACC, a 2 x 2 x 7 (Ambiguity x Status x Behaviour) mixed model ANOVA also was conducted. Significant effects for behaviour,  $F(6,648) = 15.52, p = .000$ , and a behaviour by ambiguity interaction,  $F(6,648) = 2.39, p = .027$ , were obtained once again. With regard to the main effect for behaviour, as shown in Table 2, post-hoc tests revealed that overall, the most likely behaviour was having SHEACC help the student to drop or change courses/switch tutorials, which was significantly different from all the other behaviours except for having SHEACC speak to the instructor to resolve the situation. Having SHEACC speak to the instructor was significantly preferred to making a formal complaint, writing a letter to the instructor, and personally speaking to the instructor to resolve the situation. With regard to the behaviour by ambiguity interaction, in unambiguous situations participants were less likely to do nothing and were more likely to make a formal complaint or write a letter to the instructor compared to ambiguous situations.

*Relationship Between Coping Styles and Preferred Responses to Harassment*

Correlations were calculated between each coping scale and both initial responses and responses after going to SHEACC. A conservative alpha value was used ( $p < .01$ ) given the number of correlations that were computed ( $n = 57$ ). The hypothesis that individual coping styles would be related to behavioural responses was largely unsupported for the task and avoidance coping styles. With the exception of one significant

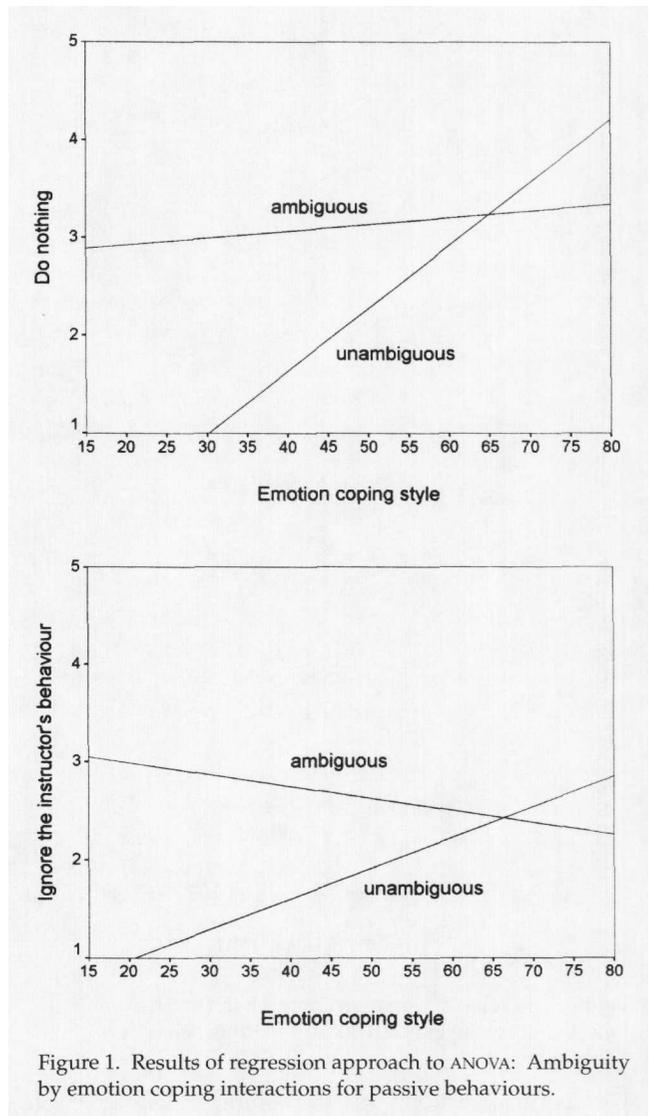


Figure 1. Results of regression approach to ANOVA: Ambiguity by emotion coping interactions for passive behaviours.

correlation found for the task coping style (participants scoring higher in task coping were more likely to indicate they would speak to the instructor themselves and try to resolve the situation,  $r = .27$ ), significant correlations were found only for the emotion coping style. Those scoring higher in emotion coping were more likely to indicate that they would do nothing both initially ( $r = .28$ ) and after going to SHEACC ( $r = .30$ ), avoid this instructor ( $r = .28$ ), and have SHEACC help them to drop or change courses ( $r = .23$ ); they were less likely to indicate that they would report the incident to the department ( $r = .26$ ), go to SHEACC for advice ( $r = .27$ ), go to SHEACC to report the incident ( $r = .30$ ), and make a formal complaint ( $r = .34$ ).

Coping styles were further examined in relation to the ambiguity of the situation and the status of the harasser by using a regression approach to ANOVA, where coping style was retained as a continuous vari-

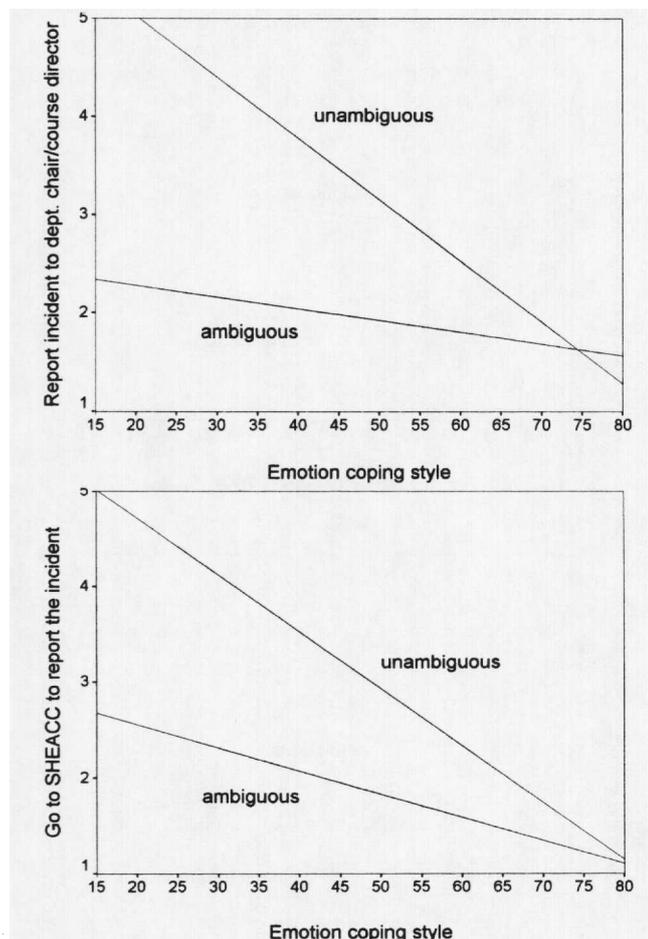


Figure 2. Results of regression approach to ANOVA: Ambiguity by emotion coping interactions for reporting behaviours.

able. For this section, only the coping style interaction effects will be reported ( $p < .01$ ). All of these interaction effects involved the emotion coping style.

For the initial responses, there were four significant effects found for the emotion coping by ambiguity interaction. These interaction effects are presented in Figures 1 and 2. For "do nothing" (see Figure 1),  $F(1,107) = 8.60$ ,  $p = .004$ , only when the situation was unambiguous was there a change in behaviour as a function of emotion coping scores – those with higher emotion coping scores would be more likely to do nothing than those with lower scores. For "ignore the instructor's behaviour" (see Figure 1),  $F(1,107) = 6.51$ ,  $p = .012$ , when the situation was ambiguous participants with higher emotion coping scores were somewhat less likely to indicate they would ignore the instructor's behaviour than participants with lower scores, but when the situation was unambiguous, participants with higher emotion coping scores were more likely to indicate they would ignore the instructor's behaviour

than participants with lower scores. For "report the incident to the department chair/course director" (see Figure 2),  $F(1,107) = 8.38$ ,  $p = .005$ , only when the situation was unambiguous was there a change in behaviour as a function of emotion coping scores – those with higher emotion coping scores would be less likely to report the incident to the department chair/course director than those with lower scores. A marginally significant interaction effect was obtained for "go to SHEACC to report the incident" (see Figure 2),  $F(1,107) = 4.25$ ,  $p = .042$ . Participants with higher emotion coping scores would be less likely to go to SHEACC to report the incident than participants with lower scores in both the ambiguous and unambiguous conditions, but there was a greater difference in behaviour for those in the unambiguous condition. Similar patterns emerge for the more passive behaviours (Figure 1), and similar patterns emerge for the more active reporting behaviours (Figure 2). For each of the behaviours, it is in the unambiguous condition that there is a greater change in behaviour between respondents having lower and higher emotion coping scores. When harassment is clear, women who score higher on emotion coping are less likely to take action.

For responses after going to SHEACC, there were two significant emotion coping by ambiguity interactions; these are presented in Figure 3. For "do nothing,"  $F(1,108) = 8.83$ ,  $p = .004$ , when the situation was ambiguous, those with higher emotion coping scores would be only slightly more likely than those with lower scores to do nothing, but when the situation was unambiguous, those with higher emotion coping scores would be more likely than those with lower scores to do nothing. For "make a formal complaint,"  $F(1,108) = 8.25$ ,  $p = .005$ , when the situation was ambiguous, those with higher emotion coping scores would be only slightly less likely to make a formal complaint than those with lower scores, but when the situation was unambiguous, those with higher emotion coping scores would be much less likely to make a formal complaint than those with lower scores. Again, for each of the behaviours, it was in the unambiguous condition that there was a greater change in behaviour between lower and higher emotion coping scores.

#### *Correlations Between Emotion Coping and Affect*

Given the centrality of emotion coping in the prediction of behaviour, the correlations between emotion coping and affective responses were also examined. Significant correlations were found only for 2 of the 6 affect measures. Participants scoring higher on emotion coping were more likely to indicate feeling fearful ( $r = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and feeling guilty ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Open Responses*

Following is a summary of the responses given to the open-ended questions, across all four conditions.

When asked how they would feel, the most common responses (as indicated by at least 10 participants) were as follows: uncomfortable (64%), scared (15%), angry (15%), flattered (13%), confused (12%), violated (10%), shocked (10%), and nervous (9%). Only two participants used the term "harassment" in their responses. When asked how they would perceive the instructor's behaviour, the most common responses were as follows: inappropriate (42%), unprofessional (25%), took advantage of his position (14%), friendly/affectionate (10%), and unacceptable (8%). Only seven participants used the term "harassment" in their responses about the instructor's behaviour.

When asked what they would do while still in the office, the most common responses were to end the meeting / think of an excuse / just leave (41%), say something to the instructor about his behaviour (24%), and put physical distance between them (24%). When asked what they would do after leaving the office, the most common responses were to speak to a friend (55%), report the incident to a higher authority (30%), think about what happened (14%), do nothing (13%), talk to family (12%), not meet with this instructor again (10%), and drop the course or switch sections/tutorials (8%). Only seven participants used the term "harassment" in this section (two of these also used the term in the previous section). In total, only 14 respondents (12%) used the term "harassment" spontaneously.

Responses to the open-ended questions reveal several obstacles to assertive action: concern about grades, fear of not being believed, lack of faith in the system, and uncertainty about what constitutes sexual harassment. It was noted that of the 15 respondents voicing these concerns, 4 were in the ambiguous condition, and 11 were in the unambiguous condition.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the present research was to examine certain factors that influence behavioural responses to sexual harassment. The study was designed to look at the effects of both situational variables (ambiguity of the instructor's behaviour and status of the harasser) and an individual difference variable (coping style). Results will first be discussed in relation to the primary factors (ambiguity, status, and coping style) and hypotheses associated with these variables.

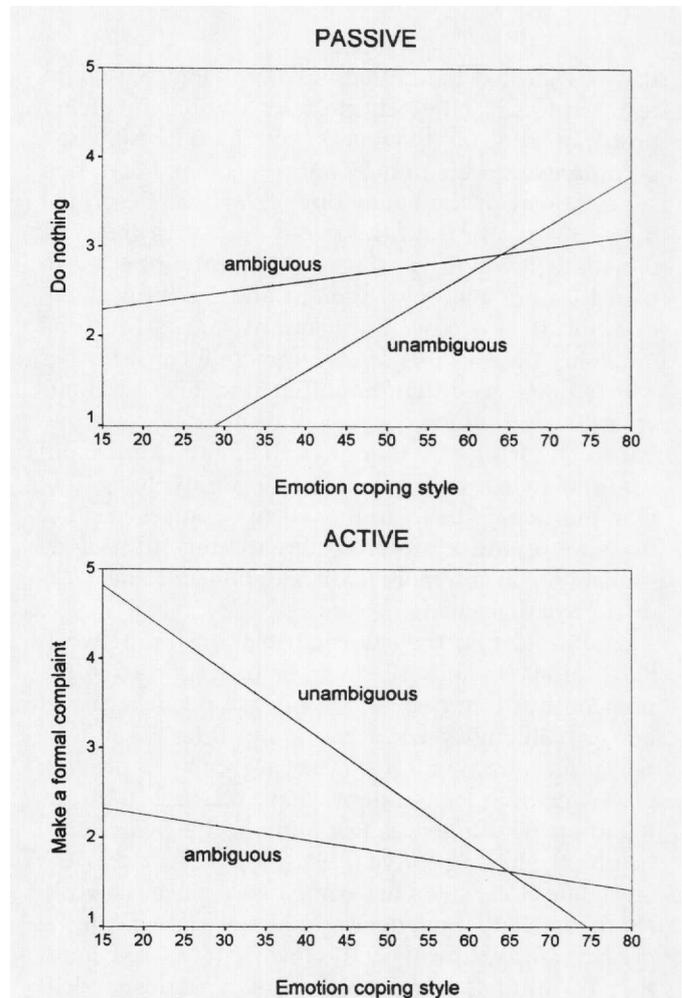


Figure 3. Results of regression approach to ANOVA: Ambiguity by emotion coping interactions for behaviours after seeking advice.

*Ambiguity*

As hypothesized, the unambiguous situations resulted in more negative affect, more negative descriptions of the instructor's behaviour, and more acknowledgment of the behaviour as sexual harassment than did the ambiguous conditions. With respect to behavioural preferences, as expected, the unambiguous situations led to more assertive responding than the ambiguous situations of sexual harassment. Assuming that unambiguous behaviours are also considered to be more severe, the present results support previous findings that severity of the behaviour increases the likelihood that it will be reported (Baker et al., 1990; Brooks & Perot, 1991; Jones & Remland, 1992; Sullivan & Bybee, 1987). Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fischer (1995) state that with regard to situational factors, the relationship between severity and active, externally focused responding is the most well-established finding in the victim response literature.

### Status

It was expected that situations involving TAS would result in less negative affect than situations involving professors, but no differences were found. Although no differences were found on the negative description scale, however, the behaviour of TAS was described more positively than the behaviour of professors. Situations involving professors also were expected to lead to more acknowledgment and labeling of the behaviour as sexual harassment than situations involving TAS, but this wasn't found either. It further was hypothesized that the different status conditions would lead to different types of responding, but only one such effect was found. Participants were more likely to switch tutorials in situations involving a TA than they would be to drop or change courses in situations involving a professor. Switching tutorials is probably seen as a more feasible option and much less disruptive than changing courses.

Failure to find the expected relationship between harasser status and assertiveness of responses in the present study may best be understood in terms of power. Although professors and TAS differ in status or power level from *each other*, they are both in a position of power over the student. Past research that has found status differences (e.g., Bursik, 1992; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Popovich et al., 1987; Stockdale et al., 1995) has compared peers or coworkers (equal status) to superiors (higher status). In the present study, however, the lower status instructor (i.e., TA) still has a higher status than the respondent and is not of equal status. It appears that once the harasser has power, the degree of power that he holds may be irrelevant.

### Coping Style

It was hypothesized that the different coping styles would relate differently to behavioural responses to harassment. It was expected that those scoring higher in task coping, which is problem-focused, would be more likely to endorse the more active behaviours such as reporting the incident. This argument was based on the assumption that such behaviours are seen as effective. A study of U.S. federal employees by Stockdale (1998), however, indicated that individuals who experienced sexual harassment and who used confrontive strategies were more likely to experience more negative work outcomes. It is possible that our respondents were not accepting the conventional wisdom that taking direct action is effective. Avoidance coping was expected to be related to behaviours such as avoiding the instructor or doing nothing. No clear support was found for either of these predictions, other than a significant positive relationship between

task coping and speaking with the instructor to resolve the situation.

It was emotion coping, which refers to self-oriented reactions such as blaming oneself, self-preoccupation, emotional responses, and daydreaming, that was associated with many behaviours. The obtained interaction effects indicated that *when the situation was unambiguous*, individuals with higher emotion coping scores were more likely to engage in passive behaviours, and less likely to engage in active, reporting behaviours. Even after seeking advice (i.e., Stage 2 responses), the same pattern held. What is it about the emotion coping style that has such an influence on responding to sexual harassment? Emotion-oriented coping has been found to be positively related to psychological distress (Endler & Parker, 1993). Individuals who score higher on this measure, then, could be more prone to distress when faced with a clear situation of harassment, and as a result be unable to manage the problem effectively. In the present study, those scoring higher in emotion coping were also more likely to indicate feeling fearful and guilty as a result of the situation, which may be linked to the avoidance of active coping behaviours. Emotion coping has also been found to be related to basic dimensions of psychopathology (see Endler & Parker, 1990b). For example, emotion coping was positively and significantly related to depression and anxiety. Endler and Parker (1990b) state that while psychologically healthy people tend to use task-oriented coping strategies, those who are experiencing psychological problems tend to use emotion-oriented coping strategies. There are, therefore, disheartening implications for the results pertaining to emotion coping. It is the women who may be most at risk psychologically who are the least likely to take proactive responses when faced with harassment. In fact, these women are more likely to withdraw. If perpetrators of harassment are able to identify these types of women, they may be more likely to target them and to continue their behaviour without being challenged.

### Behaviour and Affect, Perceptions, and Acknowledgment

As hypothesized, participants did behave more assertively when they experienced more negative affect, when they perceived the instructor's behaviour more negatively, and when they acknowledged the behaviour as sexual harassment. The present results are consistent with previous findings that participants react more assertively to behaviours that they perceive to constitute sexual harassment (e.g., Baker et al., 1990).

Also, participants experiencing stronger negative affect were more likely to acknowledge the instruc-

tor's behaviour as sexual harassment. These results are consistent with those of Stockdale et al. (1995), who found that experiencing negative affect was the strongest predictor of victims' acknowledgment of having been sexually harassed.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study, as with any other study, are limited in a number of ways. To begin, the respondents did not actually take any actions, so it is questionable whether the indicated behaviour preferences can accurately predict how individuals will behave in an actual situation. Their responses, nonetheless, can be perceived as behavioural intentions and represent the first step in taking action. According to the theory of reasoned action, human beings are basically rational and consider the implications of their behaviour in deciding whether or not to engage in a particular action. A person's intention to behave in a certain way has been described as the "immediate determinant of the action" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980, p.5). Although this study assessed only what participants *would* do hypothetically in such a situation, other studies have found a relationship between stated behavioural intention and subsequent behaviour in a variety of contexts. Examples include household recycling (Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999), voting (Granberg & Holmberg, 1990), and health-related behaviours such as breast self-examination and exercise (van Ryn, Lytle, & Kirscht, 1996).

The information presented in the scenarios also was limited. In reality, there are numerous other variables that can have an effect on responses to sexual harassment, such as the previous relationship between the instructor and the student, whether this is an ongoing situation or an isolated incident, the harasser's reaction to the victim's rejection and the possibility of retaliation, and the perceived consequences of taking particular actions. The history of harassment in a relationship (e.g., one time vs. repeated) is certainly worthy of attention in future research.

With regard to the use of stages of responding, while going to the Sexual Harassment Centre for advice would be a logical thing to do following such an incident, the study fails to take into account the potential results of the responses in the first stage. The decision to be made at this point might very well depend on the consequences of the first course of action. For example, if the matter was resolved satisfactorily between the student and the instructor and the behaviour ceased, it might seem unnecessary or pointless to continue with any further action. But if the harassment persisted, the student may need and welcome help and advice.

Regardless of these limitations, the results of this study have a number of important implications. As in previous studies (e.g., Jaschik & Fretz, 1991; Jaschik-Herman & Fisk, 1995), only a few of the participants in the present study (12%) spontaneously generated the label of sexual harassment when asked to describe the behaviour in question. In addition, 42.5% of the respondents indicated that they were unaware of the campus resources available to them if they should require advice or support regarding sexual harassment. In order for grievance procedures to be effective, those in need must be aware of these procedures, but also be aware that they have been victims of sexual harassment. Procedures for dealing with harassment will not come into play unless a complaint is made. More generally, most responses to sexual harassment tend to be passive rather than active. In the present study, the most preferred behaviours overall were talking to friends and family, ignoring the instructor, and doing nothing. Even after going to the Sexual Harassment Centre for advice, respondents showed less preference for the more active forms of behaviour such as making a formal complaint, writing a letter to the instructor, and speaking to the instructor to resolve the situation. This general tendency towards passivity may contribute to ignorance within an organization, and a lack of institutional actions regarding such incidents.

Given that an ambiguous situation was less likely than an unambiguous situation to be acknowledged as sexual harassment and to lead to assertive responding, it is important for all those in the university environment to be educated about the various behaviours that constitute sexual harassment and what can be done when such a situation arises. Even if ambiguous behaviours may be regarded as less severe, they may nonetheless represent instances of sexual harassment and should not be disregarded.

Finally, with regard to emotion-oriented coping, it appears that while those scoring higher on this measure would be the least likely to take any action when faced with a sexual harassment situation, they are probably also the most likely to be affected by it, and to need the most help. But as discussed above, unless the situation is brought to the attention of someone who is in a position to provide that help, nothing may ever be done.

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