Sexism, Harassment, & Attraction:

Studying the Effects of Various Factors on Workplace Discrimination

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Abstract

Much of the previously conducted research puts a focus on the effects of sexual harassment on the target of sexual harassment as a result of the harassment itself, or on the effects of the perceptions of the accused individual. This study aims to assess how making an accusation affects how one's co-workers perceive the accuser. A study by Dunn and Cody (2000) hinted that a negative reputation can follow the accusation of sexual harassment, so it has been predicted that the presence of a sexual harassment accusation will lead to a lower score on the dependent variables of trustworthiness, likeability, promotability, and competence when it comes to the perceptions from the accuser's coworkers on the accuser. This effect was predicted to be amplified when the accuser is a male, based on prior research indicating that males are generally perceived as more trustworthy, likeably, promotable, and competent within the workplace (McGloin & Denes, 2001; Sloan, 2012). The attractiveness of the focal character (who would be the accuser in the scenarios when there is an accusation made) was also predicted to influence the perceptions of the focal character's coworkers; Golden, Johnson, and Lopez (2001) conducted research which suggested that more attractive sexual harassment targets are often believed more than their less attractive counterparts. Overall, the past literature points to an influence of the presence of a sexual harassment accusation, gender, and attractiveness each having an effect on how one is perceived by their co-workers, so this research investigates further how these three independent variables cross each other. Ultimately, there was no main effect of any of the independent variables found on any of the dependent variables, contradicting each of the proposed hypotheses. A variety of external factors may have influenced these results, leading to this inconsistency with previously published literature.

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Literature Review

Relevance of the Issue

Within the last decade, an issue which has been increasingly prevalent in society is the frequency of sexual harassment, as well as the increase in accusations of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment accusations have spanned across every aspect of our society—from public figures like politicians and celebrities to common place workers like priests and white-collar employees. While these cases are often kept quiet or unnoticed, an increase in accusations in the recent times has led to the "Me Too" movement, with many targets stepping forward with hopes of bringing perpetrators to justice. A study done by Evans and colleagues found that two-thirds of women report witnessing sexual harassment in the workplace, and nearly one-third of women report experiencing it first-hand (2019). Evans et al. also found that sexual harassment often occurs in workplace environments that are more "permitting," and often correlates with lower job satisfaction (2019). The prevalence of this issue has attracted a lot of attention from the psychological research community, with many hoping to understand the psychology behind both the harassment and the accusation.

One of the many reasons this topic is so commonly researched, besides the obvious intrinsic issues of sexual harassment in and of itself, is the fact that it has become a common issue within the workplace specifically. With a "full-time job" usually requiring 40-hour work weeks, Americans spend a large amount of their lives within their workplace. Workplace dissatisfaction and negative workplace environments are often correlated with depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders among employees (Li, 2019). Between Li's findings about

this correlation, Evan et al.'s findings that workplace environments can sometimes be permitting factors for sexual harassment to occur, and findings by Mortensen that sexual harassment can lead to intensely negative psychological impacts, this puts a large number of Americans at risk of finding themselves in a deeply psychologically affected state when these factors are compounded (Li, 2019; Evans et al., 2019; Mortensen 2020). Workplace norms vary among different workplaces, allowing for a large discrepancy among workers and their experiences of sexual harassment. This also affects how many perceive sexual harassment, which is a topic that will be discussed later.

While sexual harassment is commonly thought of as an issue within the workplace, it could occur anywhere. Rabelo, Holland, & Cortina investigated sexual harassment's prevalence in the military, where it is often an even more taboo topic to confront (2019). While these cases are less commonly discussed, this study suggests that part of this reason is that military sexual harassment allegations are more likely to go unreported, due to external pressure, mistrust in the justice system, and fear of judgement. Similarly, Evans and colleagues also looked at the prevalence of sexual harassment in the university setting, where both professors, students, and other faculty can be targeted (2019). This can become a problem with the transfer of education, and can even stymie students from properly continuing their educational development. Whether harassment comes from students' peers or from professors, this is another example of where sexual harassment proves to have potentially disastrous consequences. In both the military setting and the educational setting, there are opportunities for abuses of power to become an aspect of sexual harassment, much like within the workplace. In any situation, any sexual or romantic tension between a superior and an inferior can prove to be risky, and it may be easy for these scenarios to cross a line in becoming considered sexual harassment. Another unique field

in which sexual harassment is sometimes seen is in long-term care facilities. In this scenario, the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable is even more complex, as the staff technically works for the residents, but still holds authority over the residents as well (Grigorovich & Kontos, 2019). Grigorovich and Kontos's paper investigates scenarios in which both the residents and caretakers may encounter sexual harassment; this issue is complicated by the often unstable or otherwise handicapped mental state of the pateints, making it difficult to hold them accountable for their actions or to speak up about situations where they are the target (Grigorovich & Kontos, 2019). Even when the lines are so blurred, targets of sexual harassment may encounter the same psychological effects as any other target, and run into many of the same obstacles when trying to decide whether or not they should make an accusation. Before confronting these issues, it should first be addressed what exactly constitutes as sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment's definition can vary; for the purposes of this study, sexual harassment refers to unwanted and/or repeated instances of sexual advances, or an abuse of power to coerce an inferior to supply sexual favors (Jeffords & Winslow, 2019). This is a generally accepted definition which covers a variety of examples of sexual harassment. When it comes to lawful or unlawful activity, this can be a complex issue due to the difficulty in finding proof or determining whether an action is obnoxious, socially frowned upon, or unlawful. According to Fabbo's article, an act of sexual harassment must be offensive to both the target and the general public in order to be considered illegal (2019). However, regardless of an action's legal weight, any form of harassment causes holds deep psychological consequences (Jeffords & Winslow, 2019). An interview conducted by Mortensen with 3 women who experienced sexual harassment in the form of leaked intimate photos revealed a large variety of psychological impacts revealed

that targets felt an overwhelming sense of shame and embarrassment, despite the harassment not being their fault (2020). Targets' feelings of hopelessness and shame are a common result of sexual harassment, and targets often feel a sense of responsibility and guilt.

Besides the broad definition of sexual harassment, there is also a complexity behind it due to a wide variety of how different people view sexual harassment. One's demographics can significantly affect how they perceive and classify different action as sexual harassment. This ties into the aforementioned issue of determining legality of a sexual harassment allegation. A study conducted by Colarelli and Haaland measured how people of different ages and sexes viewed instances of sexual harassment (2019). The study found that those of older ages viewed sexual harassment scenarios as less severe on average than did participants of younger ages (Colarelli & Haaland, 2019). Additionally, this study found that sexual harassment is seen as most severe when it occurs between a superior and an inferior, as opposed to when it happens between two people on the same level of power. Another study analyzed how witness's demographics affected how they perceive sexual harassment, and showed that feminists are more likely to consider sexual harassment severe when there is sufficient evidence. Right wing-authoritarians, on the other hand, were less likely to consider it as severe (Bhattacharya & Stockdale, 2016). Between these two studies, it can be concluded that the perceptions of sexual harassment are largely inconsistent among the members of our society, with young, female feminists generally considering it most severe, and older, male right-wing authoritarians less likely to consider it as severe.

All of these various perceptions affect the complexity of sexual harassment, and also affect the targets who must experience this. Additionally, as suggested from these prior research's findings, one' status can affect how others perceive harassment aimed toward them.

While an inferior who has been harassed by a superior may draw more sympathy due to the harassment against them being seen as more intense, someone who is harassed by someone of their own hierarchal status may draw less sympathy (Colarelli & Haaland, 2019). Likewise, female targets tend to draw more sympathy than do male targets (Golden, Johnson, & Lopez, 2001). Yet another surprising factor that affects how harassment is viewed is the attractiveness of those involved. Golden, Johnson, and Lopez's study investigated how the attractiveness of both the target and the harasser affects how witnesses perceive the harassment (2001). The results showed that attractiveness interacts with both status and gender. Male superiors were judged less harshly when they were harassers when they were more attractive. When it came to targets, it was the attractive female targets who gained more sympathy. Meanwhile, cases of sexual harassment were seen as less severe, or even less legitimate when the perpetrator was less attractive, and when the target was less attractive (Golden, Lopez, & Johnson, 2001).

Effects of Various Factors on Perceptions of Sexual Harassment Targets

When one's gender, attractiveness, and gender all affect how legitimate their sexual harassment accusations are (along with the status, gender, and attractiveness of their harasser), it can be very difficult to navigate the decision about whether or not to report a harassment. The effects of others' demographics on how they perceive the situation even further complicates the issue, leaving targets often feeling even more helpless. But how does one's reputation change after they make an accusation? According to Dunn and Cody, the reputation of both the accuser and the harasser are tarnished once an accusation is filed (2000). Another study, done by Pica, Sheahan, and Pozzulo found that making a sexual harassment accusation can even affect one's credibility in terms of future accusations (2020). In this study, jurors were asked to give their

reaction to the credibility of sexual harassment allegations. Cases involving women with prior allegations were significantly more likely to result in a verdict of the defendant being "not guilty" than cases with the exact same details, but involving a woman with no past allegations (Pica, Sheahan, and Pozzulo, 2020). This suggests that there is a decrease in trustworthiness among women who have made accusations in their past, at least when it comes to future allegations in court. This further implies that there are a host of different implications that come with the accusation of a sexual harassment. A study done by Rabelo, Holland, and Cortina determined that many people often don't report sexual harassment or sexual assault because of their distrust in the "system," or lack of faith in the likelihood of justice being achieved (2019). Corruption in the system can be seen in the example of jurors being less likely to believe women with multiple allegations in their history; however, this explanation for women not coming forward is likely not the only factor. Afterall, if you make an accusation and nothing happens, one really has nothing to lose. There must be additional factors in play—and these additional factors likely relate to social implications of making an accusation. Will coworkers see sexual harassment targets who make accusations as less trustworthy after the accusation is made, similarly to how the jurors did in the aforementioned study? If so, addressing this issue with ways to potentially combat it can be a useful step in helping those who have experiences sexual harassment. Dunn and Cody's study's findings suggest that this is indeed the case, being that making an accusation of sexual harassment was found to have negative impacts on one's overall reputation (2000).

Before investigating to what extent prior research suggests that trustworthiness within the workplace is affected by sexual harassment accusations, it is crucial to begin by understanding where the stigma behind sexual harassment accusations comes from. The truth is, among the sea

of unfortunately legitimate sexual harassment accusations, there are unfortunately also many accusations that are indeed false. In Fabbo's article, the author suggests false sexual harassment allegations are sometimes made in an attempt to avoid being fired, or as a form of retaliation for an unrelated reason (2019). Just as in the case of a legitimate accusation, false accusations lead to a downfall of the reputation of both the accuser and the accused (Fabbo, 2019). Likewise, these accusations are harmful because they perpetuate the already apparently widespread stigma surrounding sexual harassment accusations. This is a large part of the reason that sexual harassment targets can often be looked down upon, or feel guilty after making an accusation. Many also criticize feminists for taking the side of the alleged target even when there is insufficient evidence; the findings of Bhattacharya and Stockdale's study, however, found that feminists are only more likely to sympathize with the target when there is indeed ample evidence, debunking the myth that targets are too often unfairly believed (2016). Additionally, targets are often accused of exaggerating details of the harassment, leading to more skepticism surrounding accusations. This myth is also debunked by a study done by Nahleen, Nixon, and Takarangi. Even when the accusations are legitimate, the target often may find it more difficult to receive sympathy than even their accuser—Dunn and Cody's study investigating sexual harassment found that perpetrators of sexual harassment are often seen as more competent and more trustworthy if they admit that the allegation was true (2000). In other words, while the target receives negative backlash, the accuser can both verify the accusation and potentially salvage his or her own reputation.

When it comes to social impacts of the sexual harassment accusations, it has already been seen that the general reputation of the accuser is damaged, accusers are seen as less trustworthy in future court allegations, and that attractive females are given significantly more sympathy and

considered more believable than those who are male and/or less attractive (Dunn & Cody, 2000; Pica, Sheahan, & Pozzulo, 2020; Golden, Johnson, & Lopez, 2001). While each of these studies point to suggested social effects of how sexual assault accusers are seen differently be their peers after making an accusation, they do not focus on specific changes of their coworkers' perceptions. The implications of these studies, however, do suggest that a target's coworkers will find him or her to be less trustworthy and less competent when dealing with their job, and even day-to-day social interactions. While the data does not support these assumptions to be true, it does point to these being potential assumptions made subconsciously by others. However, the fact that attractiveness of the target seems to play a clear factor in how he or she is perceived is an indication that these specific perceptions run deeper than results of just sexual harassment accusations.

When it comes to sexual harassment, women who were more attractive were found to be more trustworthy and deserving of sympathy in their allegations than their less attractive counterparts (Golden, Johnson, & Lopez, 2001). But what are the effects of attractiveness on trustworthiness without the context of sexual harassment? Although one may expect it to remain the same, the truth appears to be quite the opposite—based purely on appearances, women who are more attractive tend to be seen as less trustworthy, while men were seen as more trustworthy when they were more attractive (McGloin & Denes, 2018). While this is consistent with Golden and colleagues' finding that men who were charged with sexual harassment are more likely to regain sympathy and be more believed when they were more attractive, these results have opposing implications when it comes to women (2020). This implies that sexual harassment and/or the accusation of the harassment is a significant factor in trustworthiness and general

perception. This leads to me study proposal which would cross each of the aforementioned variables in order to find where (if anywhere) there are significant correlations.

Looking at gender, regardless of attractiveness, there is plenty of room for discrimination to be found as well. As seen already in McGloin & Denes's study, males are seen as more trustworthy from initial perceptions (2018). Another study done by Sloan, which investigated how co-worker support affects workplace satisfaction, found that women are often seen as less competent and hireable within the workplace, often leading to unfair treatment (2012). While it has been suggested that steps can easily be taken to reprimand these issues, the issue of gender discrimination within the workplace is still quite prevalent. This bias is likely to be compounded by the effects of attractiveness and the presence of a sexual harassment accusation, which will be discussed later.

Research Proposal

Research Design

In order to study these underlying biases, profiles were created which participants read, asking them to imagine that they work in an office-setting with an acquaintance whose profile they are reading. The focal character of this profile was either male or female, and the story included a picture of this person. The participant then read about this person's work history, and other facts about him or her. The coworker was aged in his or her late 20s. There was also a section indicating workplace disputes, where it will either be written that he or she has made a sexual assault allegation, or that they have no history in this area. The participant was then asked

a series of questions which gauged their perceptions of this person. A list of dependent variables was examined in this portion, followed by manipulation checks and demographic questions.

As per the independent variables referenced above, this was a 2x2x2 factorial design, with the independent variables being gender, presence of a sexual harassment accusation, and attractiveness. For gender, the options were either "male" or "female." For presence of a sexual harassment accusation, there was either an "accusation present," or "no accusation present." And finally, for attractiveness, the subject of the profile was either shown to be attractive or "unattractive." This results in the following eight conditions:

- o Attractive male with no accusation present

- o Attractive male with accusation present

- o Unattractive male with no accusation present

- o Unattractive male with accusation present

- o Attractive female with no accusation present

- o Attractive female with accusation present

- o Unattractive female with no accusation present

- o Unattractive female with accusation present

For each of these conditions, participants formed subconscious perceptions about the subject of the profile (likely, unique ones based on their randomly assigned condition), which would hopefully have become apparent by answering some questionnaires. These questionnaires were focused on a set of dependent variables.

The first dependent variable this study aimed to investigate is trustworthiness. This was measured via a series of statements followed by a Likert scale ranging from 1-7, with 1

indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3 indicating "somewhat disagree," 4

indicating "neural," 5 indicating "somewhat agree," 6 indicating "agree," and 7 indicating

"strongly agree." Examples of questions measuring trustworthiness include "this person appears

trustworthy," "I would trust this person with a secret," and "this person seems like a 'tattle-tale.'"

General likeability of the person depicted was also measured. The same Likert scale can be used

in combination with statements regarding likeability such as "this person appears likeable" and

"I would enjoy socializing with this person outside of work." Another dependent variable

measured was competence, using the same Likert scale with statements reflecting competence,

e.g., "this person seems like (he or she) is good at (his or her) job," and "this person appears

competent." A similar measure with slightly different implications that can was used as a

dependent variable is promotability. This was measured by the use of the same Likert scale using

statements as "I would promote this person to a higher position" and "this person would be an

efficient employee."

Importance of Study

This study is important because of the intensely deep psychological effects it confronts.

As discussed earlier, the workplace is a place where Americans spend much of their time, and

dissatisfaction within the said workplace can lead to increased rates of mental disorders

including depression and anxiety (Li, 2019). Likewise, sexual harassment is known to correlate

with negative workplace environments, and also cause negative psychological issues on its own

(Evans et al., 2019; Mortensen, 2020). There is a gap in the research in investigating how gender

along with both attractiveness and prevalence of a sexual harassment accusation affect how one

is seen by their coworkers. Filling this gap would be incredibly beneficial because it hits on a

variety of subconscious biases which significantly affect many people's quality of life. The most direct way to overcome biases is by confronting and exposing them, then working to put in place systems to repair them. Sexual harassment can be addressed and combatted, and fundamentally changing workplace environments can be incredibly beneficial to reversing this issue (Jeffords & Winslow, 2019).

Hypotheses

When it comes to the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables, a variety of hypotheses can be made based on previous research. The first independent variable that can be measured to have a potential main effect on the dependent variables (trustworthiness, likeability, competence, and promotability) is the presence of a sexual harassment accusation. When it comes to trustworthiness, the Pica. Sheahan, and Pozzulo study suggests that making a sexual assault accusation leads to a jury to perceive the accuser as less trustworthy (2020). This effect of trustworthiness would likely compound itself to affect the participant's perceived promotability, competence, and likeability of the accuser. Similarly, the Dunn & Cody study, which suggests that making a sexual harassment accusation leads to a negative reputation, supports these thoughts (2000). This leads to Hypothesis 1: the presence of a sexual harassment accusation will have a main effect on the dependent variables such that participants in conditions where a sexual harassment accusation are present will rate the person in the profile lower on trustworthiness, likeability, competence, and promotability.

As for attractiveness's main effect, all of the evidence can be taken from the study by McGloin & Denes, who studied people's initial perceptions of others based off of attractiveness

(2018). They found that as attractiveness increased, so did participants' perceived trustworthiness of the people. Likewise, they tended to like the more attractive people more at a first glace. Similar results were found in the Golden, Johnson, and Lopez study found that sexual harassment targets who were more attractive were sympathized with more, and implied that they had a higher competence and trustworthy level in the workplace (2001). These studies provide sufficient evidence to make Hypothesis 2: attractiveness will have a main effect on the dependent variables such that as attractiveness increases, so will the participants' perceived trustworthiness, likeability, competence, and promotability of the accuser. These same studies provided evidence for the independent variable of gender; McGloin & Denes found that males were found to be more trustworthy and competent (2001). Likewise, females were shown in Sloan's study to be discriminated against due to perceived lack of competence and promotability within the workplace (2012). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is that gender will have a main effect such that males will be perceived to have higher levels of trustworthiness, competence, likeability, and promotability.

After addressing each independent variable individually, the next topic to address is how these independent variables would interact with each other. First looking at the presence of a sexual assault accusation and attractiveness, the Golden, Johnson, and Lopez study is the first point of information for this topic (2001). This study found that as the target's attractiveness increased, so did the sympathy and believability of the target. This implies that attractiveness in the target makes them perceived as more trustworthy. However, as seen by the study done by Dunn and Cody, the presence of a sexual harassment intrinsically decreases perceived trustworthiness and competence levels (2000). Since these independent variables are predicted to have opposite effects on the dependent variable (as seen in Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2), one

can derive Hypothesis 4: there will be no significant interaction between attractiveness and the presence of a sexual harassment accusation on the dependent variables. However, it can be predicted that the conditions including the lesser-attractive person with a sexual harassment accusation will score lowest when it comes to each dependent variable, while the attractive individuals with no sexual harassment accusations will score highest.

When crossing gender and the presence of a sexual harassment accusation, research is a bit more limited; a majority of research done focuses on a female target. As seen in McGloin and Denes's study, however, males are generally perceived as more trustworthy (2018). This is backed up by Golden, Johnson, and Lopez's findings that in sexual harassment cases, males were often found to be more believable than females (2001). Again, since Dunn and Cody found that making a sexual harassment accusation has a negative impact on overall perceptions, it will be those with no sexual harassment accusations that are seen as scoring highest on the dependent variables' scores (2000). This leads to Hypothesis 5: there will be an interaction between the presence of a sexual harassment accusation and gender such that males with sexual harassment accusations will be perceived as more trustworthy, likeable, competent, and promotable as compared to females with a sexual harassment accusation. When it comes to attractiveness and the gender, the findings that males are perceived as overall more trustworthy and competent than females are compounded by the fact that people are also seen as more trustworthy when they are more attractive, yet females are seen as less trustworthy and competent when they increase in attractiveness (McGloin & Denes, 2018; Sloan 2012). This leads to Hypothesis 6: there will be an interaction between attractiveness and gender such that both being a male and being more attractive will correlate to scoring higher in trustworthiness, likeability, competence, and

promotability; however, females who are more attractive will score lower in trustworthiness, but will still score higher in each of the other categories.

The final hypothesis which must be addressed is the hypothesis regarding how all three independent variables will interact overall. The previous studies suggest that the dependent variables would likely all increase as attractiveness increases, when there is no sexual harassment accusation, and when the person being perceived is male (McGloin & Denes, 2018; Golden, Johnson, & Lopez, 2001; Dunn & Cody, 2000). Likewise, it has been said that there are interaction effects hypothesized when crossing both the independent variables of gender the and the presence of a sexual harassment, and gender and attractiveness. When it comes down to crossing all three of these together such that attractive males with no sexual harassment will score higher on the overall dependent variable score, while the less attractive females with a sexual harassment accusation will score lowest on this scale. It has been clear that above all other factors, it is sexual harassment accusations which lead to a decrease in an employee's reputation (Dunn & Cody, 2000). When it comes to the final two independent variables, gender was shown to have a stronger effect on perceived trustworthiness and promotability, regardless of attractiveness (McGloin & Denes, 2018; Sloan, 2012). This leaves attractiveness to be the least polarizing variable. All of this leads to the final hypothesis, Hypothesis 7: the independent variables will all interact such that the conditions can be ordered from scoring highest to lowest on the dependent variable scale in this way:

- o   Attractive male with no accusation present

- o   Unattractive male with no accusation present

- o   Attractive female with no accusation present

- o   Unattractive female with no accusation present

- o   Attractive male with accusation present

- o   Unattractive male with accusation present

- o   Attractive female with accusation present

- o   Unattractive female with accusation present

Utility of Potential Results

With the workplace being where many Americans spend a significant amount of their time, it is important to confront how discrimination and biases within the workplace may affect the workers, as well as how other dangers (such as sexual harassment) may additionally affect workers. It is no secret that workplace dissatisfaction can lead to mental illness and instability; however, discrimination of all kinds still remains so prevalent within the workplace (Li, 2019). One such discriminatory factor is gender—women are often seen as less competent than men in the workplace, and often experience discrimination for this reason day-to-day (Sloan, 2012). Likewise, both men and women who are more attractive are considered to be more likeable and even more competent (McGloin & Denes, 2018). Finally, sexual harassment accusations often prove to be detrimental to the accuser's reputation, and affect how trustworthy they are perceived (Dunn & Cody, 2000; Pica, Sheahan, & Pozzulo, 2020). With all of these factors affecting one's work environment and therefore their mental health, it is critical to study how they may interact and the exact effects they may have in order to attempt to address them properly. Confronting discrimination is the only way to overcome it, and this study aims to confront it head-on.

Method

Design

The current experiment formed a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design with gender of the focal character (male, female), attractiveness of the focal character (more attractive, less attractive), and presence of a sexual harassment accusation (present, absent) as the between subject factors. With these measures, the dependent variables that were measured were the participants' perceptions of the focal character's likeability, competence, trustworthiness, and promotability.

Participants

The sample consisted of 71 undergraduates from a small liberal arts college in the southeastern United States. The sample consisted of mostly females (63.60%) and white students (85.70%). Participants were recruited via the FSC psychology/social sciences participant pool, and extra credit / course credit was awarded in exchange for participation as determined by their course instructor. The study was "advertised" on the SONA website.

Procedure

First, participants opened the link to a SurveyMonkey on which the experiment took place. The first page was the informed consent, where participants agreed to participate in this study. Upon agreeing to the informed consent, participants were shown a portfolio of the focal character. This portfolio included information as a part of one of the eight conditions:

- Attractive male focal character with no sexual harassment accusation present

- Unattractive male focal character with no sexual harassment accusation present
- Attractive male focal character with sexual harassment accusation present
- Unattractive male focal character with sexual harassment accusation present
- Attractive female focal character with no sexual harassment accusation present
- Unattractive female focal character with no sexual harassment accusation present
- Attractive female focal character with sexual harassment accusation present
- Unattractive female focal character with sexual harassment accusation present

The portfolio included a picture of the described focal character, which is the character who would have made a sexual harassment accusation in the conditions that there is an accusation present. It also included a story from a second-person point of view, where the reader is put into the position of a co-worker of the focal character. In the conditions in which there was a sexual harassment accusation present, the participant were said to have overheard another co-worker mention that the focal character made this sexual harassment. The story went on to describe the participant's relationship with the focal character (acquaintances and co-workers), the focal character's work place, and some more information regarding their work life. All factors regarding the focal character besides their photo, gender, and presence of a sexual harassment accusation were held consistent across all conditions.

Once participants had read through the portfolio, they were tasked to answer a questionnaire pertaining to their perceptions of the focal character, named Jaime Thompson. The questionnaire included a series of statements, to which participants rated how much they found the statements to be accurate according to the aforementioned Likert scale. These statements all relate to one of the dependent variables (promotability, likeability, competence, and trustworthiness). Ultimately, the categories were compiled into averages according to which variable they referred to.

Upon finishing this questionnaire, participants then proceeded to answer the Manipulation Check Survey, which asked a few questions pertaining to the portfolio in order to gauge how much participants paid attention (*e.g., "what was the focal character's name?" "How old was the focal character?" "What was the gender of the focal character?"*). After these were answered, participants answered the Demographics Questionnaire, and were promptly debriefed.
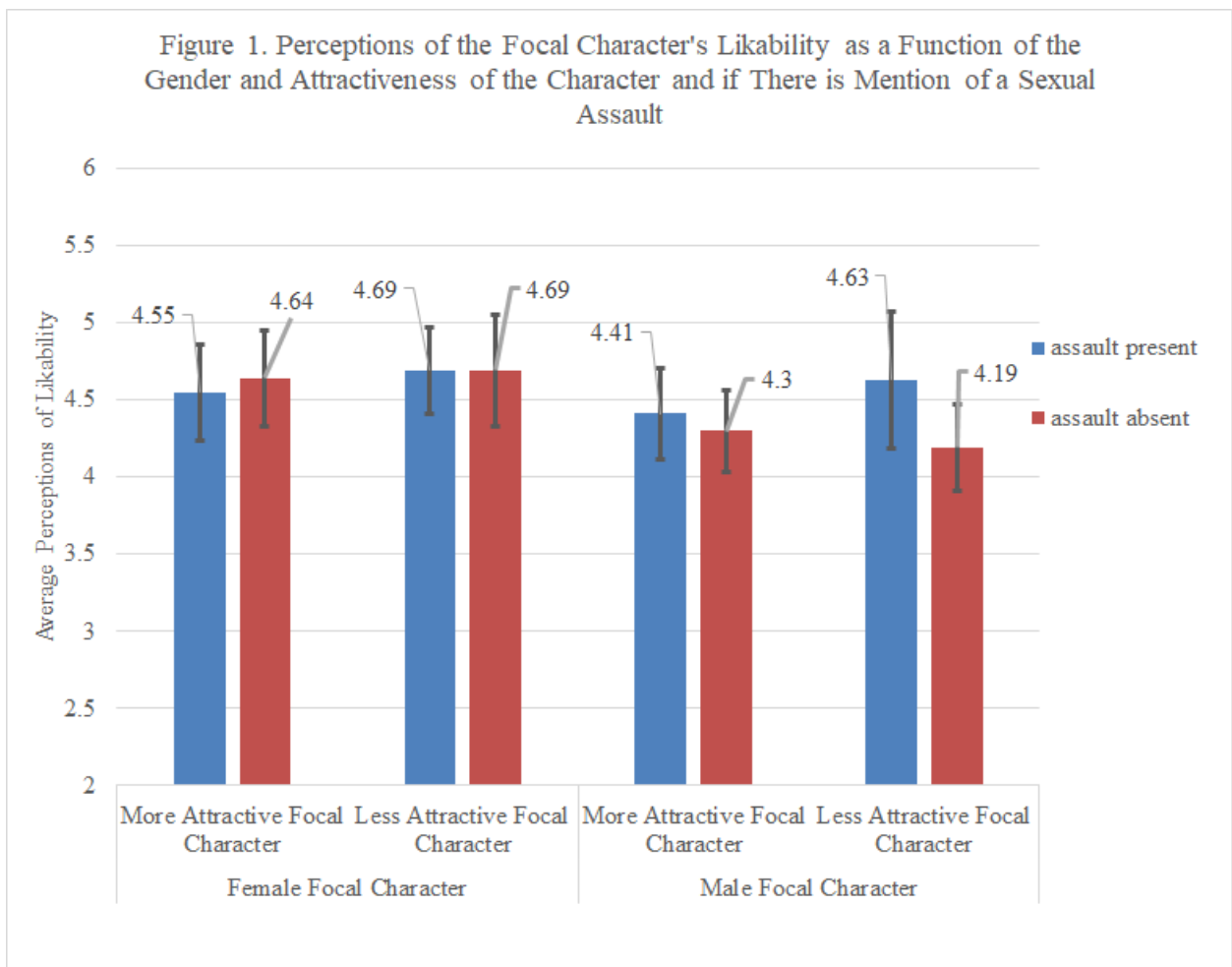
Results

A series of 2 x 2 x 2 between-subject factorial ANOVAs were conducted with focal character's gender (male, female), focal character's attractiveness (more attractive, less attractive), and presence of a sexual harassment accusation made by the focal character (present, absent) as the between-subjects factors, and participant perceptions of the focal character's likability, trustworthiness, promotability, and competence as the dependent variables.

The results and charts are shown on the following pages for each of the dependent variables.
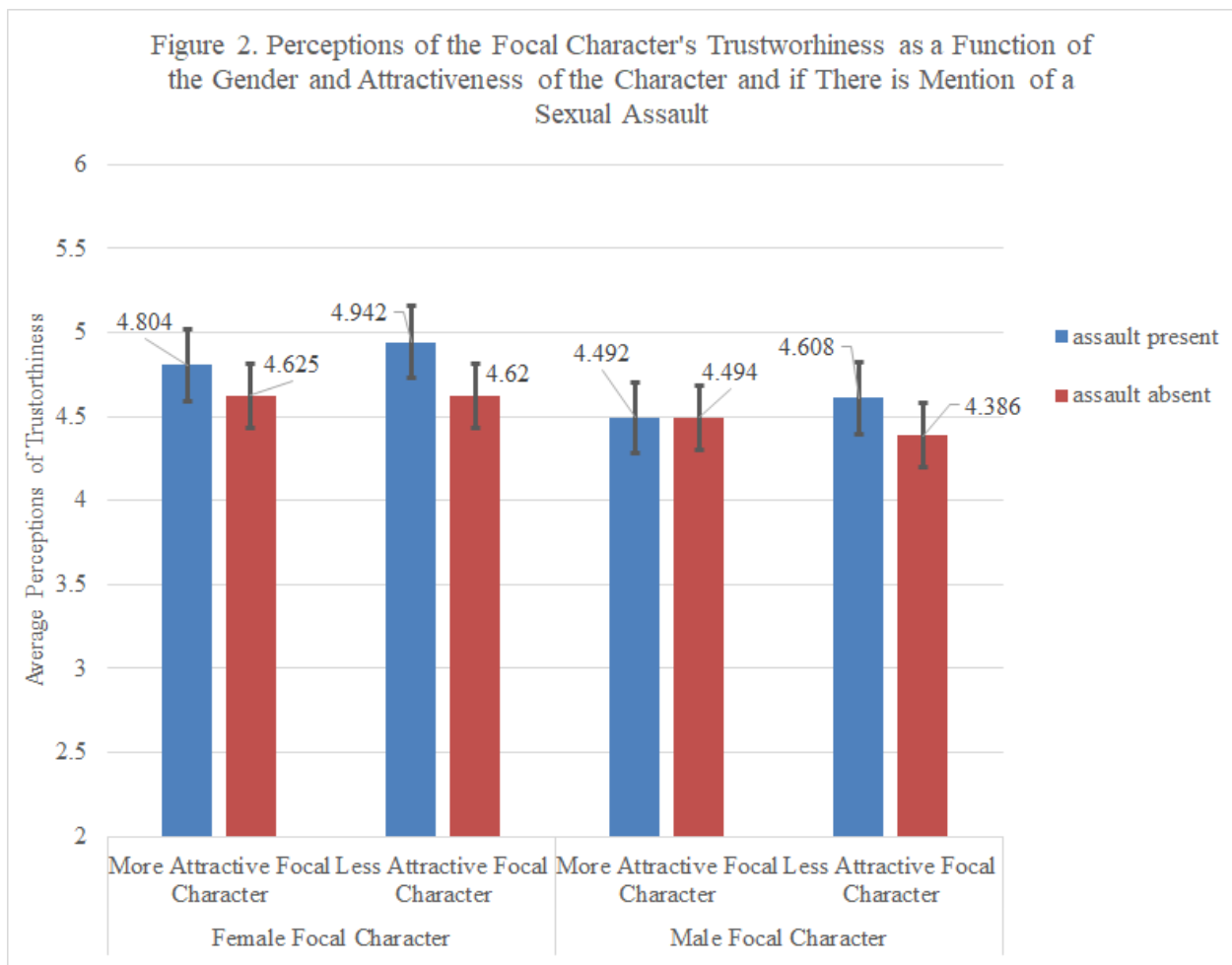
Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Likeability

As shown in figure 1, there was no main effect of gender of the focal character, $F(1, 58) =$ 1.33, $p = .25$, attractiveness of focal, $F < 1$, or presence of accusation, $F < 1$ on perceptions of likeability. Furthermore, the two-way interactions between gender & attractiveness, gender & presence of an accusation, and attractiveness & presence of an accusation, as well as the three-way interaction between gender, attractiveness, and presence of an accusation were not significant, $Fs < 1$.

Figure 1. Perceptions of the Focal Character's Likability as a Function of the Gender and Attractiveness of the Character and if There is Mention of a Sexual Assault

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Trustworthiness

As shown in figure 2, there was no main effect of gender of the focal character, F (1, 58) = 2.63, p = .11, attractiveness of focal, $F < 1$, or presence of accusation, F (1, 58) = 1.34, p = .25, on perceptions of trustworthiness. Furthermore, the two-way interactions between gender & attractiveness, gender & presence of an accusation, and attractiveness & presence of an accusation, as well as the three-way interaction between gender, attractiveness, and presence of an accusation were not significant, $Fs < 1$.
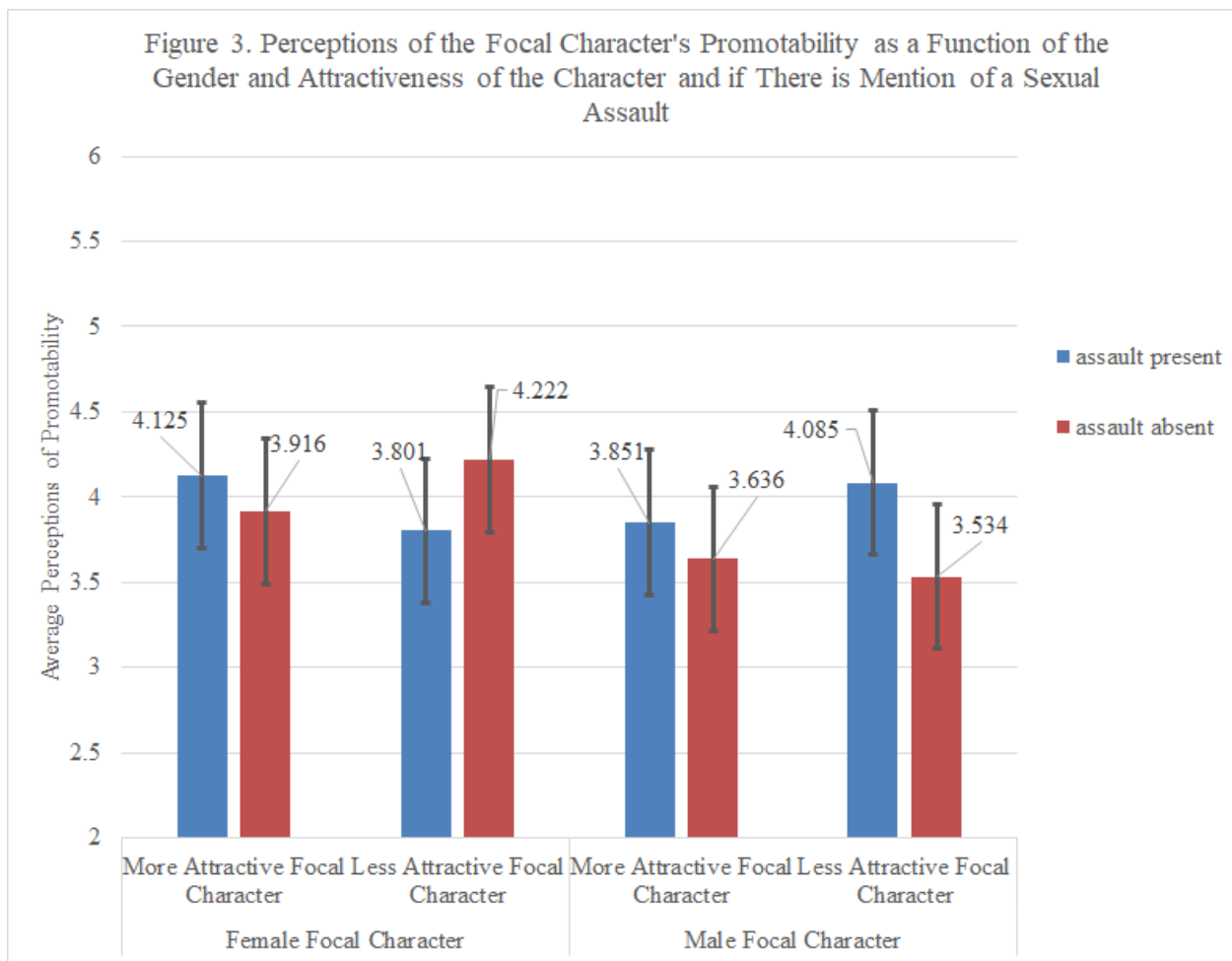

Figure 2. Perceptions of the Focal Character's Trustworhiness as a Function of the Gender and Attractiveness of the Character and if There is Mention of a Sexual Assault

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Promotability

As shown in figure 3, there was no main effect of gender of the focal character, $F < 1$, attractiveness of focal, $F < 1$, or presence of accusation, $F < 1$ on perceptions of promotability. Furthermore, the two-way interactions between gender & attractiveness, gender & presence of an accusation, and attractiveness & presence of an accusation, as well as the three-way interaction between gender, attractiveness, and presence of an accusation were not significant, $Fs < 1$.
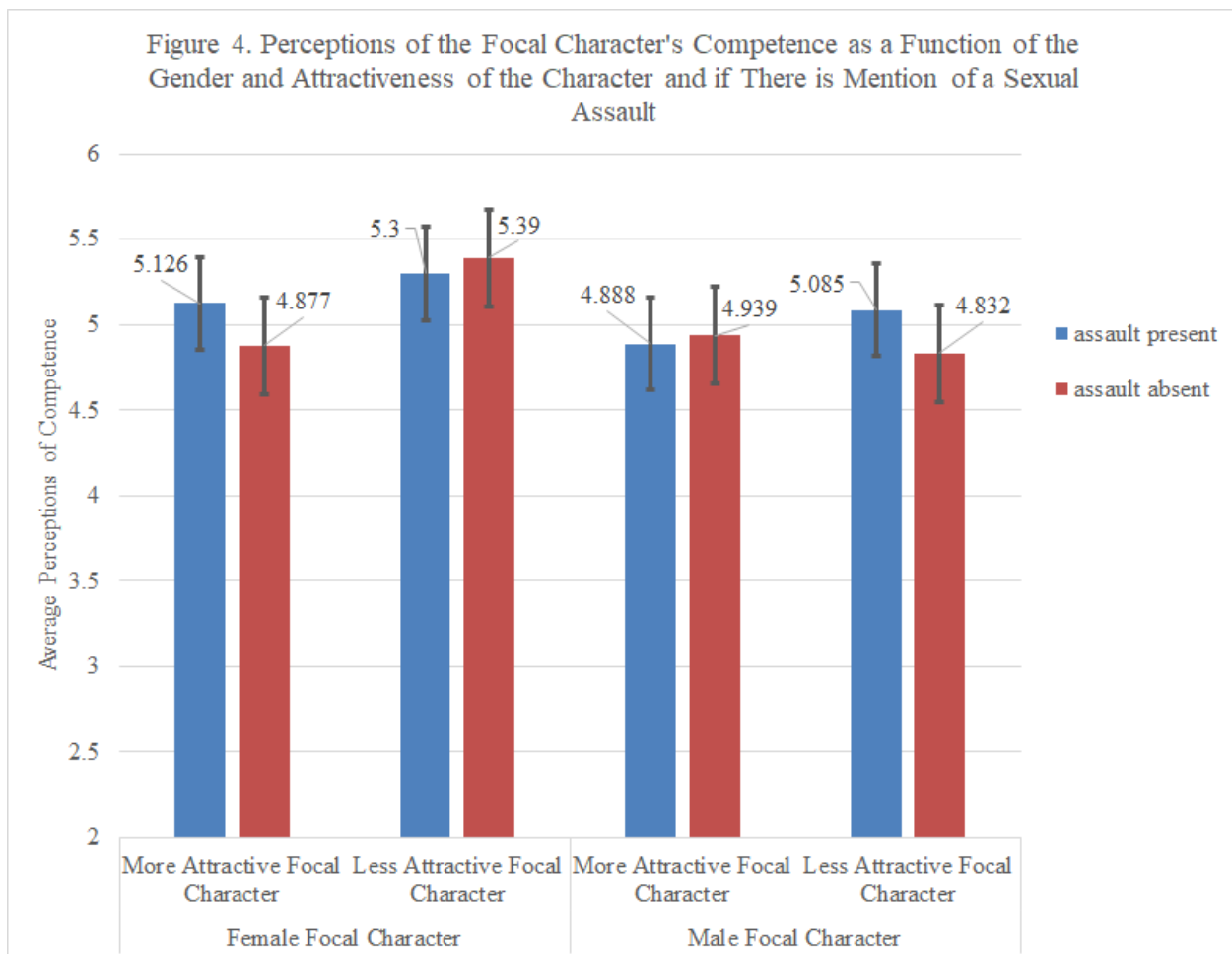

Figure 3. Perceptions of the Focal Character's Promotability as a Function of the Gender and Attractiveness of the Character and if There is Mention of a Sexual Assault

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Competence

As shown in figure 4, there was no main effect of gender of the focal character, $F(1, 58) = 1.28$, $p = .26$, attractiveness of focal, $F < 1$, or presence of accusation, $F < 1$ on perceptions of competence. Furthermore, the two-way interactions between gender & attractiveness, gender & presence of an accusation, and attractiveness & presence of an accusation, as well as the three-way interaction between gender, attractiveness, and presence of an accusation were not significant, $Fs < 1$.

Figure 4. Perceptions of the Focal Character's Competence as a Function of the Gender and Attractiveness of the Character and if There is Mention of a Sexual Assault

Discussion

None of the aforementioned hypotheses were supported by the results, as there were no main effects found between the independent and dependent variables. At a first glance, this is confusing, as this directly contradicts much of the previously conducted research on this topic. However, there are a few factors which may have influenced this lack of consistency. The first factor which must be considered is the fact that this study was conducted online; participants could easily click through quickly without internalizing the content, leading to a lack of true consideration of all the implicitly and explicitly disclosed variables. Similarly, the fact that the portfolios were proposed to the participants as hypotheticals, in which they were asked to "imagine" things, may remove the real-life aspect of the variables. It is quite possible that participants who experienced this hypothetical Jaime Thompson in real life may have developed more strong feelings about him or her than when they just read about and imagined him or her.

While the results of the manipulation check indicated very few total lapses of recollections (most participants correctly recalled the information asked of them, and if not reported very similar answers), this does not necessarily reflect that all of the participants took time to fully internalize every aspect of the portfolio. This could have also played a part in skewing the data.

Future experiments using a similar design can be done in an in-person setting, possibly adding more social pressure to internalizing the information. Additionally, case studies could be done to analyze these factors, however there would be little room for comparison due to a lack of controlled environment. All in all, these effects are seemingly impossible to study in a "perfect" way, operating within ethical guidelines.

Other factors which may have also contributed to this data being skewed include the lack of diversity within participants (all were undergraduate students at Florida Southern College, more than half were white and female). Perhaps if a more even gender and racial distribution was included, along with a sample of adults with real-world work experience, results would be more profound and possibly even more accurate.

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