

# When the Customer Shouldn't Be King: Antecedents and Consequences of Sexual Harassment by Clients and Customers

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Much of the work in today's service industries requires women to deal with people *outside* of their organizations, namely, customers and clients, yet research on sexual harassment has focused almost exclusively on sexual harassment *within* organizations. Because the threat of harassment also operates at the boundaries of organizations, our existing models based solely on harassment inside organizations may be too restricted to adequately explain the harassment experiences of women in today's economy. To address this, the authors introduce a theoretical model of the antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment by clients and customers (CSH) and describe 2 field studies conducted to test components of the model. In Study 1, they developed a model of antecedents and consequences of CSH and illustrated that certain contextual factors (client power and gender composition of the client base) affect levels of CSH and that CSH is related to a number of job and psychological outcomes among professional women. Study 2 revealed that CSH is related to lower job satisfaction among nonprofessional women, above and beyond that which is accounted for by internal sexual harassment. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* sexual harassment, power, clients and customers, job satisfaction, gender

Barriers to the advancement of women in the workplace have been given widespread attention in the academic and popular press, so much so that terms such as “wage gap,” “glass ceiling,” and “sexual harassment” have become part of our common parlance. A myriad of roadblocks to women's success have been documented, from sexual harassment and sex-role stereotyping (Rosenberg, Perlstadt, & Phillips, 1993; Rudman & Glick, 1999), to exclusion from powerful networks and access to mentors (Dreher & Cox, 1996), to overt discrimination (Bamberger & Admati-Dvir, 1995). Scholarly research on these topics has not only been essential to the advancement of theory on organizational barriers faced by women, but also has been critical in identifying interventions for organizational decision makers (Bennet, 2002).

Notwithstanding this progress, research has focused almost exclusively on barriers *within* the boundaries of organizations, although much of today's work in the burgeoning service industries requires women to deal with people *outside* of the organization, namely, clients and customers. Indeed, the number of employees working in the service industries has increased by one third between 1992 and 1997 alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). This marked change in the landscape of the workplace raises the important question as to whether there are unidentified barriers in this

service context that present problems for women that mirror, and possibly even exacerbate, barriers that occur within the traditional boundaries of the organization.

The purpose of this research is to investigate one such barrier, namely, sexual harassment by clients and customers, or *client sexual harassment* (CSH). Although there has been a great increase in research on sexual harassment of women by people within the organization (or *intraorganizational harassment*; see Fitzgerald, 2003, for a review), there has been a dearth of attention to antecedents and consequences of CSH. This is surprising given that in some service contexts employees spend a significant amount of their time with customers or clients, either because they interact almost exclusively with customers (Rafaeli, 1989), or because they work remotely from their clients' offices (Gillis, 2003). Many of these women are required to spend time with clients given the necessary close proximity of customers in their job (e.g., cashiers) or because of the importance of developing client relationships to their career success (e.g., sales representatives). Moreover, customers and clients may have significant influence over an employee through formal and informal evaluations (Rafaeli, 1989; Yammarino & Atwater, 1997) and through the dependency of the employee and/or her company on the client's business (Fine, Shepherd, & Josephs, 1999; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Therefore we argue that the lack of empirical research on CSH is a consequential omission.

It is worth noting that employers do in fact have a legal obligation to protect their employees from harassment by third parties [29 Code of Federal Regulations 1604.11(e)], and organizations have been found liable for CSH in a number of lawsuits (e.g., EEOC v. Sage Realty, 1981; Lockard v. Pizza Hut, 1998). However, there is little empirical research on CSH despite the fact that the popular press (Clancy, 1994; Lawlor, 1995; Stevens, 1994) and recent law review articles (Ream, 2000; Vaughn, 2002) suggest

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that women are experiencing CSH in significant numbers. It has been argued that intraorganizational harassment had to undergo “problematization” in the academic research in the 1980s in order for women to gain the means with which to defend themselves from harassment (Hughes & Tadic, 1998; Weeks, Boles, & Garbin, 1986). CSH may very well need to undergo a similar process.

In sum, despite the increase of research on sexual harassment within organizations, there is a paucity of theory and research on CSH. There are critical questions about CSH that need to be addressed: What are the antecedents that influence the occurrence of CSH? Are outcomes of CSH similar to those of intraorganizational harassment, or are there unique outcomes in the client context? To begin to address these questions, we first introduce a theoretical model of the antecedents and consequences of CSH, drawing on and expanding Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, and Magley’s (1997) model of intraorganizational harassment. We then describe two field studies conducted to test components of the model. In Study 1, we develop a measure of CSH and examine certain antecedents of CSH (e.g., client power and client gender context) and examine whether CSH is related to a number of job and psychological outcomes among professional women. In Study 2, we extend our findings in Study 1, assessing whether CSH explains decrements to job satisfaction above and beyond those accounted for by intraorganizational harassment.

### A Theoretical Framework of the Antecedents and Consequences of Client Sexual Harassment

Consistent with Fitzgerald et al.’s (1997) theory, our theoretical framework is based on the notion that levels of CSH generally have their basis in situational and organizational factors that encourage or discourage sexual harassment by clients and customers. Accordingly, we posit that CSH is a function of both the client

context (i.e., client power, client gender context, client accountability) and the organizational context (i.e., service pressure climate within the organization). We also enumerate a number of outcomes we expect to be associated with CSH, including both mediating proximal outcomes and more distal outcomes (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Finally, we introduce a new construct—*employee withdrawal from clients*—and propose that women who are harassed by their clients engage in behaviors of withdrawal from their clients, which may ultimately have negative consequences for their careers. In all, we apply and extend the established model of intraorganizational harassment in the client context (see Figure 1). In the next section, we elaborate upon the relationships depicted in the model.

### Antecedents of CSH

We expect that there are multiple antecedents that affect levels of CSH, specifically client power, client gender context, client accountability, and service pressure climate. First, we expect that client power will be positively related to levels of CSH. Numerous scholars have argued that harassment is conceptualized as an outgrowth of power (organizational, personal, or sociocultural power; see MacKinnon, 1983; Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). Further, research in regard to men’s propensity to sexually harass has shown that men who are high in the likelihood to harass are more likely to do so in situations where they are in a position of power (Bargh & Raymond, 1995; Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). In this study, we conceived of client power in a dependency framework (El-Ansary & Stern, 1972; Lawler & Bacharach, 1987; Spekman, 1979), where clients have power vis-à-vis others based on their control over outcomes important to them, namely the client’s business (cf. Bargh et al., 1995). This conceptualization is consistent with French and Raven’s (1959) view of power as the ability to punish or reward. Indeed, Fine et al. (1999)

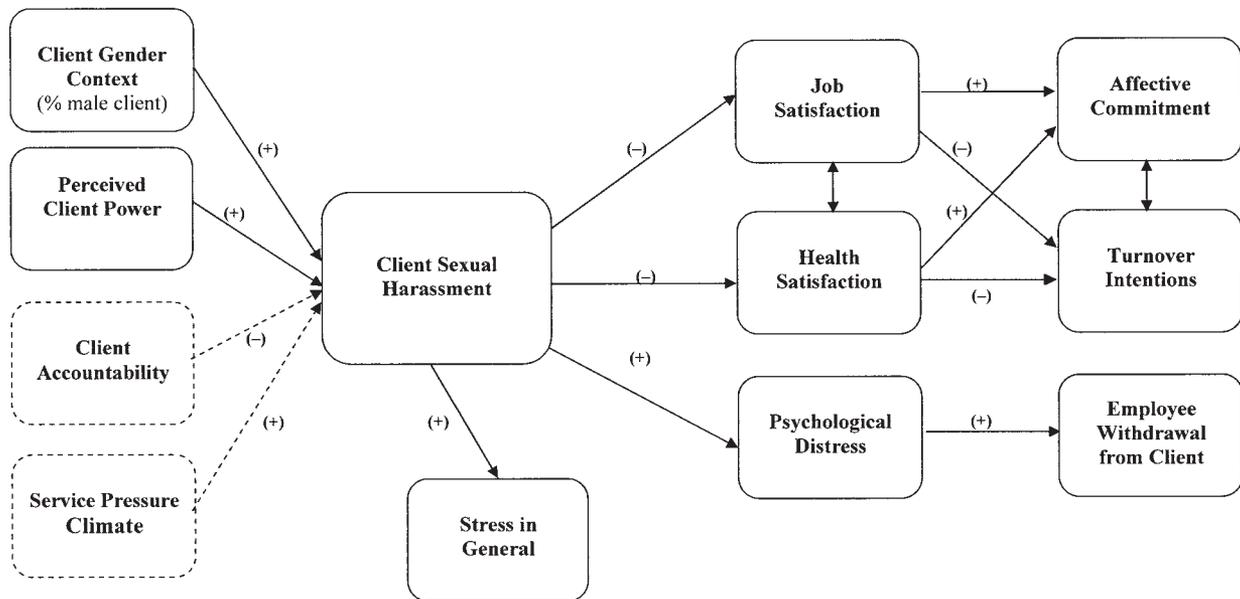


Figure 1. Overall model of antecedents and consequences with predicted direction of path. Variables in dashed boxes were not tested in this study.

found that customer coercive and reward power predicted levels of harassment by customers.

Second, as has been found in intraorganizational research with job gender context (the proportion of coworkers and supervisors that are male; Fitzgerald et al., 1997), we expect that the client gender context, or gender composition of the client base, will predict levels of CSH, with a greater percentage of male clients resulting in more CSH. We expect this to be the case because workplaces that are more male dominated tend to have more sexualized environments, which result in the display of more harassing behaviors (Gutek, Cohen & Konrad, 1990). Moreover, a greater percentage of male clients are expected to be related to higher levels of CSH because it results in women having more contact with men. The more contact women have with men, the greater the opportunity will be for them to be harassed (Gutek et al., 1990).

Third, as seen in Figure 1, we posit that client accountability will be related to levels of CSH. Research indicates that situational factors can result in sexual harassment when they act as disinhibitors. Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow (1996) explained, "Men who want to sexually exploit do so when the circumstances. . . permit such behavior" (p. 137). A lack of accountability for their actions may act as a disinhibitor of harassing behavior by clients and therefore result in higher levels of CSH. Specifically, when client behavior is not visible to people within the organization (e.g., when clients interact with employees alone or largely off site), clients will be less accountable for their actions and therefore will engage in harassing behavior more frequently. Clients are also likely to feel less accountable when they perceive that norms within the host organization are tolerant of intraorganizational harassment. Research has shown that customers can in fact form accurate understandings of internal climates (see B. Schneider & Bowen, 1985; and B. Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). Thus, we posit that clients and customers are able to discern when they have latitude to harass based on internal norms for harassment. When clients perceive little accountability for their actions, whether it be through lack of visibility or permissive norms, we predict that levels of CSH will be higher.

Finally, we posit that the service pressure climate of the organization will have an impact on CSH. In organizations that have a high-pressure service climate, that is, where a pleasing the customer at any cost mentality is encouraged, supported, and rewarded, employees are placed in a position of vulnerability or lesser power vis-à-vis the client, which we predict will result in increased harassment by clients. For reasons cited above, women who are in a position of lesser power are more likely to be harassed. Additionally, men and women differ in their interpretation of friendly behavior, with men more likely to misperceive friendliness as a sign of romantic interest (Stockdale, 1993). Therefore, in organizations with high-pressure service climates where employees are under pressure to engage in friendly behaviors toward customers, women will be more likely to be misunderstood by male customers as being romantically interested in them. In fact, female employees filed charges against Safeway grocery stores based on the notion that Safeway's requirement of strict adherence to service guidelines (which included mandatory smiling and use of customers' names) regardless of customer behavior resulted in significant increases in CSH (charges filed on November 10, 1998; see Ream, 2000). However, a service pres-

sure climate should be differentiated from a mere focus on sales or customer service. Many companies reliant on client or customer sales emphasize customer service, but each organization has unique policies, practices, and procedures (B. Schneider et al., 1998), resulting in variation across organizations as to what lengths they expect employees to go to please the customer (i.e., whether the climate promotes service and sales at any cost).

### *Consequences of CSH*

The model includes a number of proximal and distal outcomes posited to be associated with CSH. Sexual harassment has generally been understood to have its negative effects through its role as a workplace stressor (Glomb et al., 1997). Research on job stressors has demonstrated that workplace stress results in negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences as well as a negative impact on psychological and physical well-being (Tetrick & LaRocco, 1987). Categorizing CSH as a workplace stressor is appropriate, as situations perceived as stressful include a range from extreme events (as sexual coercion and assault could reasonably be categorized) to less severe everyday hassles (as milder forms of gender harassment could be categorized; Fitzgerald et al., 1997).

An important question is whether women who are harassed by clients experience stress and negative outcomes similar to those linked to intraorganizational harassment (e.g., psychological distress and job dissatisfaction). We argue that women are particularly vulnerable to stress caused by harassment by clients and customers. Clients are often a focal point of many women's work, and the importance of clients' business to women's success may be considerable, making it difficult to escape from, or even report, harassment by clients successfully. Therefore, we investigate the notion that CSH is related to variables previously shown to be related to intraorganizational harassment, including job and health satisfaction, psychological distress, affective commitment and turnover intentions, as well as an outcome unique to the client context: behaviors of employee withdrawal from clients.

As depicted in the model, we expect CSH to be negatively related to job and health satisfaction (Magley, Waldo, Drasgow, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Additionally, we expect CSH to be negatively related to job and health satisfaction, which in turn will be related to lowered affective commitment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). We also anticipate that CSH will ultimately be related to turnover intentions through its effects on both health satisfaction and job satisfaction (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). General stress is included in the model in order to depict that CSH is expected to account for outcomes above and beyond those caused by general stress levels (Fitzgerald et al., 1997).

Finally, in Figure 1, we include an outcome of CSH unique to the client context. Drawing on the literature about coping with sexual harassment (Fitzgerald, Gold, Brock, & Gelfand, 1993; Magley, 2002) and paralleling Hanisch and Hulin's (1990, 1991) construct of organizational withdrawal, we expect that professional women who experience CSH may engage in *employee withdrawal from clients*, or behaviors that distance them from their clients. This could include, for example, no longer aggressively pursuing new business with the harassing client and/or attempting to get coworkers to take over some of that client's business. As can be

seen in Figure 1, we expect that CSH's effect on employee withdrawal from clients will be mediated by the psychological distress caused by that harassment. That is, the more distressed a woman is about the harassment, the more likely she will be to withdraw from the offending client.

In sum, Figure 1 offers an integrated model of antecedents and consequences of CSH. We examined components of the model in two field studies. In Study 1, we developed a measure and tested a portion of the model. In Study 2, we extended a portion of Study 1, looking at the effects of CSH on job satisfaction, above and beyond those of intraorganizational harassment.

### Study 1

In the first study, we tested a measure of CSH and examined several of its antecedents and consequences, as illustrated in Figure 1.

*Hypothesis 1:* We hypothesized that the client gender context and client power would be related to levels of CSH, with more male-dominated client bases and greater client power predicting higher levels of harassment (Hypotheses 1a and 1b, respectively).

*Hypothesis 2:* We hypothesized that CSH would have direct negative outcomes, being related to reduced job and health satisfaction and increased emotional distress (Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c).

*Hypothesis 3:* Finally, we hypothesized that CSH would have indirect harmful effects on affective commitment, turnover intentions, and employee withdrawal from clients (Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c, respectively), as mediated by job satisfaction, health satisfaction, and psychological distress.

We used structural equation modeling to test these hypotheses.

Study 1 was conducted in two parts: a pilot study of the measure of CSH, which was based on the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995), followed by a quantitative survey. The purpose of the pilot study was to verify the appropriateness of the SEQ for use in the client context. Table 1 presents the original SEQ items.

#### *Pilot Study of Client Sexual Harassment Measure*

The SEQ was created to measure sexual harassment in the intraorganizational context and is the most widely used (Donovan & Drasgow, 1999) and valid (Vaux, 1993) measure of its kind. The conceptual domain and measure of sexual harassment found in Fitzgerald and her colleagues' work was intentionally created to be general and not bound by context. Therefore, we anticipated that the dimensions and items would generalize to the client context. A pilot study was conducted to verify this assumption. The dimensions found in previous research included *unwanted sexual attention* (unwanted, unreciprocated, and offensive behavior of a sexual nature), *sexual coercion* (attempts to get sexual cooperation by bribes or threats), and *gender harassment* (which is comprised of *sexist hostility*, or

Table 1  
*Original Sexual Experiences Questionnaire*

In the last 2 years, how often have you been in a situation where a male supervisor or coworker. . .
1. told offensive sexual stories or jokes?
2. made unwelcome attempts to draw you into discussion of sexual matters?
3. treated you differently because of your sex?
4. made offensive remarks about appearance, body or sexual activities?
5. made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature that offended you?
6. displayed, used, or distributed sexist or suggestive materials?
7. made offensive sexist remarks?
8. made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage him?
9. continued to ask you for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though you said "No"?
10. made you feel like you were being bribed with a reward to engage in sexual behavior?
11. made you feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative?
12. touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?
13. made unwanted attempts to stroke, fondle, or kiss you?
14. treated you badly for refusing to have sex?
15. implied better treatment if you were sexually cooperative?
16. put you down or was condescending to you because of your sex?

discriminatory hostility based on sex, and *sexual hostility*, or hostility shown in a more explicitly sexual way). They were created to be "necessary and sufficient to classify any particular incident of harassment, and they constitute the irreducible minimum of the construct as it is currently understood" (Gelfand et al., 1995, p. 167). In fact, these dimensions, as well as the measure and model, have been found to generalize in a variety of contexts, including the military (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Magley, 1999), higher education (Fitzgerald, 1996), across job types (professional, technical, clerical, and blue collar; Gelfand et al., 1995), across cultures (Turkey and the United States; Wasti, Bergman, Glomb, & Drasgow, 2000), and even harassment of tenants by landlords (Reed, Collinsworth, & Fitzgerald, 2005).

To verify that the measure would generalize to the client context, we engaged in a qualitative pilot study where we interviewed women in regard to their experiences with their clients. The women solicited to participate in this study were women in professional occupations, defined as those that involve knowledge work (i.e., requiring the ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge), and generally requiring professional or business education to develop the knowledge and competencies necessary to perform successfully (Drucker, 1994). Women were solicited through e-mail, their e-mail addresses procured from publicly available professional directories (*Martindale Hubbell* directory for attorneys, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology directory for consulting psychologists, *Washington Representatives* for lobbyists, directories of the Women's Business Network and National Association of Women Business Owners for business women).

A total of 14 women were interviewed.<sup>1</sup> The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 59, with an average age of 40.4 ( $SD = 9.6$ ). Twelve of the participants were White, one was Latina, and one was Asian. The women worked in a variety of professions, including law, human resources consulting, medical technology consulting, and sales, business, and political action.

Interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person at the participant's choice of location (e.g., her office or home) and lasted from 30 min to 2 hr, with an average of approximately an hour. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission, and participants were guaranteed anonymity. A semistructured interview technique was used. Each interview focused on the following topics: (a) the circumstances surrounding the inappropriate behavior, (b) characteristics of the client, (c) the participant's actions in response to the inappropriate behavior, and (d) the effects of the incidents on the participant personally and professionally. However, participants were permitted to take the interview in the direction of their choosing, with minimal prompting.

Two individuals (Hilary J. Gettman and an undergraduate psychology student who had been trained with regard to the categories) independently coded the transcripts. Coding was done by using three categories: (a) harassing client behaviors, (b) actions of the women in response to the harassment, and (c) personal and professional outcomes. In the initial comparison, the two coders agreed on 84% of the behaviors, actions, and outcomes coded, with those instances where one coder had merely overlooked the behavior/response/outcome counting as disagreement. The coders went back and coded the instances they had overlooked, and the resulting agreement was 95%. All remaining differences were resolved through discussion. From here, lists of harassing behaviors the interviewees experienced, as well as consequences of and reactions to those experiences, were compiled.

On the basis of the interviews, we determined that the SEQ was appropriate for the client context. Specifically, we determined that behaviors relating to each of the SEQ items were found to occur with clients and also that all of the instances of CSH mentioned by women in our sample were accounted for by an existing SEQ item. Therefore, we created Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Client version (SEQ-C) by modifying items for the client context (see Table 2). The SEQ-C is discussed in more detail in the next section.

### Survey Study of Client Sexual Harassment

A survey of professional women was conducted to test the structure of CSH and to test a portion of the theoretical model. To this end, the preliminary SEQ-C, along with other measures (described below), was administered to 394 women through a Web-based survey. Data were collected from participants recruited from the same publicly available professional directories used in the pilot study. No woman contacted for the pilot was contacted for the survey. In the survey study, women from all across the United States were contacted through e-mail and asked to participate in a survey regarding issues women face in dealing with their male clients, including both positive experiences and inappropriate treatment. The solicitation did not use the term sexual harassment, so that women's harassment experiences or opinions of harassment would not influence their choice of whether or not to participate in the survey. A link to the survey was included in the e-mail, and

Table 2  
*Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Client Version Items and Factors*

In the last 2 years, how often have you been in a situation where a male customer or client
Unwanted sexual attention
... repeated requests for dates, drinks, etc., despite being told no?
... attempted to establish a romantic relationship?
... attempted to stroke, fondle, or kiss?
... touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?
Sexist hostility
... put you down or was condescending to you because of your sex?
... treated you differently because of your sex?
... made offensive sexist remarks?
Sexual hostility
... attempted to draw you into discussion of sexual matters?
... told offensive sexual stories or jokes?
... made offensive gestures of a sexual nature?
... made offensive remarks about appearance, body or sexual activities?
... displayed, used, or distributed sexist or suggestive materials?
Sexual coercion
... bribed with a reward to engage in sexual behavior?
... threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative?
... treated badly for refusing to have sex?
... implied better treatment if you were sexually cooperative?

each link could only be used once in order to control participation in the survey. Reminder e-mails were sent out approximately 2 weeks after the initial solicitation.

The response rate for the survey was 27%, with 394 (of 1,438) women responding to the survey. Although Web-based research is relatively new, the existing literature indicates that internet studies generally have lower response rates (Kraut et al., 2004; Paolo, Bonaminio, Gibson, Partridge, & Kallail, 2000), but there does not appear to be significant differences in findings compared with other methods (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). The participants ranged in age from 23 to 70, with an average age of 43 ( $SD = 10.1$ ), 53% of the sample were married, and 48% had children (with an average of 1.96 children). Of the 338 participants

<sup>1</sup> Interviewees were solicited and interviewed in three separate waves. Each group was e-mailed and asked whether they had any experiences where they were "treated inappropriately" by a client based on their gender, and if so, would they be willing to be interviewed in regard to that situation. Out of 110 women who were contacted at three different time periods, 24 responded positively (a response rate of 22%), but it was determined through brief phone conversations or e-mail that the inappropriate treatment experienced by 10 of them was clearly not sexual harassment as it was not related to their gender at all but was more along the lines of bullying (e.g., clients yelling, being overly demanding, difficult, rude), so they were not interviewed. After each wave of four or five interviews, the interviews were transcribed and coded to help determine when theoretical saturation, or redundancy, had been reached and whether to go on to another wave of solicitations and interviews. Redundancy was defined as reaching asymptote: That is, the information gained from each interview added in only a negligible way, typically giving a new fact pattern to the same type of behavior (Bloor, 2001). Following Yin (1994) and Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997), after the third wave of interviews, it was determined that the interviews were no longer yielding additional useful information, so no more interviewees were solicited, and the interviews were concluded.

(86%) who reported their race, 92% were White. The average income was in the \$75,000 to \$100,000 range. The participants were all from the United States, representing 34 states. The women worked in a variety of fields: 30% were attorneys; 24% were consultants; 19% were in business/financial professions; and the remaining 27% were in other professions, including lobbying and training. Ninety-three percent of the participants had at least a college degree, and 38% were self-employed.

### Measures

Participants completed a Web-based survey titled, "Client Relations Survey." They were told that they would be asked about their attitudes and perceptions of themselves, their jobs, their clients, and specific interactions with clients.

**Measure of CSH.** The participant's sexual harassment experiences were measured using the 16-item SEQ-C, found in Table 2. We used the instructions from the SEQ (Gelfand et al., 1995), modified to refer to clients and customers (i.e., "In the last 2 years, how often have you been in a situation where a male client or customer. . ."). As is standard practice in research on sexual harassment, the term *sexual harassment* was not used to avoid influencing the women's responses based on their individual definitions of sexual harassment or any opinions they might have in regard to the topic (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995). We provided a list of the 16 items regarding possible behaviors experienced by the respondent, using a 5-point scale of 0 (*never*), 1 (*once or twice*), 2 (*sometimes*), 3 (*often*), and 4 (*many times*). A scale score was created by averaging all of the behavioral items. The coefficient alpha in this sample was .92.

**Antecedents.** Client gender context and client power were investigated as possible antecedents of CSH. Consistent with previous intraorganizational harassment research in regard to job gender context (Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 1997), client gender context was operationalized as the reported proportion of clients who were male. There are no existing measures of client power. As discussed above, consistent with French and Raven's (1959) conceptualization of power as the ability to punish or reward, we conceived of client power in a dependency framework (Lawler & Bacharach, 1987; Spekman, 1979), where a client has power over a woman when he has control over business that is important to her or her employer (cf., Bargh et al., 1995). Therefore, we measured client power by using five items about perceptions of the importance of the client's business to the woman and her organization and the client's ability to take that business away. The items were as follows: "If you lost the client's business or were moved off the project/case/etc., would your career suffer?" "How important was that client to your company financially?" "Did that client have the power to take his business away from your company?" "Did the client have the power to take his business from you and have it assigned to a different employee within your company?" and "Approximately what percent of your personal business portfolio/sales/billable hours were reliant on this client?" The scale score was computed using the mean of the  $z$  scores of the items ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

**Outcomes.** Job satisfaction was measured by using the Job in General scale, which measures global job satisfaction (Balzer et al., 1997; Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989). Job satisfaction has been shown to predict intentions to quit (Ironson et

al., 1989) and affective commitment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). The measure asked the respondent, "All and all, what's your job like most of the time?" and then asked if each of a series of 18 adjectives and phrases such as "pleasant" and "worse than most" were descriptive of their experience ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

Turnover intentions were assessed by using a subset of the Job Withdrawal scale developed by Hanisch and Hulin (1990, 1991), which measures self-reported absences, intentions to be absent, intentions to quit, and thinking about quitting. The four items from that scale in regard to quitting (intentions to quit and thinking about quitting) were used here to assess turnover intentions. Participants responded on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 to 5 (the anchors depended on the specific question). Sample items included "How often do you think about quitting your job?" and "All things considered, how desirable is it for you to quit your job?" ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Affective commitment, which is a component of organizational commitment, was measured by using Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) six-item measure. Affective commitment measures genuine identification and psychological attachment to the organization. Sample items included "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me" and "I do not feel like part of the family at my organization." Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .89$ ).

Satisfaction with physical health was assessed by using the Health Satisfaction Index subscale of the Retirement Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). This measure asked respondents whether or not each of a list of eight words and short phrases was descriptive of their health, using simple "yes," "no," or "?" responses. Such phrases included "never felt better" and "have a lot of minor ailments" ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

Psychological distress was measured by using the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Checklist for civilians (Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska, & Keane, 1993), a 17-item self-report measure developed to assess PTSD symptoms in nonmilitary populations. Five items focused on the reexperiencing of the traumatic events (e.g., "You had repeated, disturbing dreams of this situation"), seven measured avoidance symptoms (e.g., "You avoided thinking about or talking about this situation or avoided having feelings related to it"), and five measured hyperarousal (e.g., "You were 'super-alert' or watchful or on guard"). Using a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*), respondents rated the extent to which they had been bothered by each symptom ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Because items in the PTSD and employee withdrawal from clients (the next measure) scales directly referenced an incident of harassment, only those who had been harassed (i.e., endorsed at least one SEQ-C item) were asked these questions.

A measure of employee withdrawal from clients was developed to explore the behaviors victims engaged in toward their clients in response to CSH. The original seven items were based on the behavioral items of Fitzgerald's Coping With Harassment Questionnaire (which includes both behavioral and cognitive coping mechanisms; Fitzgerald et al., 1993; Magley, 2002), but they were also informed by withdrawal behaviors found in the focus interviews. The items were administered, and an exploratory factor analysis was conducted, resulting in one factor, with one item being dropped because of low loading. The six remaining items were "I tried to get a co-worker to handle interactions with that client," "I made up some excuse so he would leave me alone," "I

no longer pursued new business with the client as aggressively,” “I avoided contact with the client as much as possible,” “I tried not to be with the client alone (i.e., made sure there would be other people around when meeting with the client, brought co-worker to meetings, etc.),” and “I acted cold or unfriendly toward the client in order to discourage his behavior.” Participants responded on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all descriptive*) to 5 (*extremely descriptive*). The scale score was computed by using the mean of the six items ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Other variables.* Participant demographics, salary, industry, and tenure were asked for in a general information section. As is standard in sexual harassment research (Cortina et al., 2002; Glomb et al., 1997), the Stress in General scale (Smith, Sademan, & McCrary, 1992) was included in order to show that CSH accounts for outcomes above and beyond that which is caused by general stress levels in participants’ lives. This measure asked respondents whether or not each of a list of 16 words and phrases was descriptive of their job, using simple “yes,” “no,” or “?” responses. Such phrases included “demanding” and “hassled” ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

## Study 1: Analysis and Results

### *Assessing the Structure of the SEQ-C*

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the dimensionality of the SEQ-C items.<sup>2</sup> The data were tested, using the four-factor structure often found in intraorganizational harassment research: unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, and the two dimensions of gender harassment of sexist hostility and sexual hostility. Because individual items tend to have low reliabilities and often violate assumptions of multivariate normality, it is often preferable to conduct CFAs on homogeneous item clusters or “parcels” instead of using individual items as indicators (Bandalos, 2002; Nasser & Wisenbaker, 2003). Therefore, CFA was conducted by using two parcels for each factor, which were created based on item–total correlations so that reliability within each parcel was balanced within each factor. The fit indices included a  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 2.02, comparative fit index (CFI) of .99, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .06, and standardized root mean residual (SRMR) of .02. Schumaker and Lomax (1996) stated that an RMSEA below .05 indicates good fit and between .05 and .08 indicates satisfactory fit, but more recently Hu and Bentler (1999) have argued that an RMSEA of .06 or below indicates good fit. Accordingly, we believe that an RMSEA of .06, in conjunction with the other fit indices, indicates good fit of the

factor structure to the data. Table 2 lists the items in their factor groups.

Each of the four factors—sexual hostility, sexist hostility, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion—exhibited good reliability, with standardized item alphas of .85, .80, .86, and .89, respectively. Finally, as seen in Table 3, the factors were significantly intercorrelated at the .01 level. These correlations indicate that the factors were interrelated but still represented distinct constructs, which is consistent with the theory that various forms of harassment occur not in isolation but in combination (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; K. T. Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997).

### *Frequency*

Sexist hostility was the most common form of CSH in this sample, having been experienced at least once by 86% of the women surveyed. This was followed by sexual hostility, which was reported by 67% of the participants; unwanted sexual attention, reported by 40% of the participants; and finally, sexual coercion, reported by 8% of the women surveyed. In addition, harassment rates were also compared based on age, race, industry, job tenure, and whether the participants were self-employed. There were no significant differences in frequency of harassment based on industry, age, or tenure in current position, though differences were found based on race, with non-White participants experiencing more harassment than White participants,  $F(1, 288) = 4.88$ ,  $p < .05$  (Cohen’s  $d = .43$ ). Additionally, those who were self-employed experienced significantly more CSH than those who worked for others,  $F(2, 304) = 5.67$ ,  $p < .01$  (Cohen’s  $d = .39$ ).

### *Antecedents and Consequences*

Next, the antecedents and consequences of CSH were examined. The means, standard deviations, and internal consistency reliability of all of the variables in this model and their intercorrelations can be seen in Table 4. As the correlation table shows, some of the outcomes were interrelated (e.g., turnover intentions and affective commitment) but still represented distinct constructs.

Structural equation modeling, as conducted with the Mplus statistical program (Muthén & Muthén, 1998), was used to test this model. The analysis incorporated a structural model, where relationships among variables were specified. To assess this overall structural model, we fixed paths (at zero) or freed (allowing Mplus

Table 3  
*Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Client Version Factor Intercorrelations*

Item	1	2	3	4
1. Gender harassment—sexual hostility	—			
2. Gender harassment—sexist hostility	.64**	—		
3. Unwanted sexual attention	.55**	.44**	—	
4. Sexual coercion	.31**	.33**	.70**	—

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

<sup>2</sup> Please contact Hilary J. Gettman for more information regarding the CFA. Data were discarded for participants who missed more than one SEQ-C item or more than 50% of the items in the entire survey, leaving a total sample of 346. For the participants who had skipped only one item on the SEQ-C, the mean was imputed for that item (Finkbeiner, 1979). For items missing from other variables, the data were eliminated listwise in the relevant analyses. The participants who were eliminated were analyzed and compared with those who were included in the general analyses. The only difference found in means or in correlations among constructs was that the excluded participants were less affectively committed to their organizations (with means of 18.5 and 23.2, respectively,  $p < .05$ ). This difference does not likely pose a threat to the validity of the analyses in this study, as the women who are included scored more positively in one component of their affective state than those not included. Therefore, the results found in the study were not the result of the self-selection of more negatively affective and less-committed women taking the survey.

Table 4  
Intercorrelations Among All Model Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. % men	66.5	22.4	—									
2. Client power <sup>M</sup>	0.93	0.05	.08	.71								
3. Client harassment	0.60	0.47	.14*	.38**	.92							
4. Stress	24.51	12.32	.13*	.23*	.24**	.88						
5. Job satisfaction	45.04	10.09	-.10†	-.10	-.19**	-.42**	.88					
6. Health satisfaction	16.52	6.30	-.03	-.06	-.20**	-.38**	.27**	.78				
7. Turnover intentions	0.70	0.54	.08	.06	.07	.38**	-.55**	-.28**	.95			
8. Affective commitment	8.45	3.94	-.08	-.65	-.02	-.26**	.51**	.20**	-.62**	.84		
9. Posttraumatic stress <sup>M</sup>	31.08	9.92	.01	.33**	.46**	.25**	-.08	-.21**	-.21**	.04	.89	
10. Employee withdrawal <sup>M</sup>	2.37	1.02	-.04	.20**	.51**	.14*	-.09	-.14*	.09	-.08	.42**	.85

Note. Alphas are listed on the diagonal.

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

to estimate them) according to the hypothesized theoretical relations shown in Figure 1.<sup>3</sup> Those paths that were not specified in the model were fixed at zero. The fit indices for the initial structural model included a  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 3.68, CFI of .86, RMSEA of .11, and SRMR of .08. These statistics suggested that some revision of the basic model was necessary.

In reassessing the model, we reasoned that three additional paths were theoretically justified. First, a direct path was inserted from CSH to employee withdrawal from clients. We reasoned that it was likely that the degree to which a woman withdrew from a client would be directly related to the extent that he was harassing her, that is, levels of harassment would directly affect withdrawal behaviors rather than affecting withdrawal solely through psychological distress. Second, affective commitment and turnover intentions were allowed to covary. Affective commitment and turnover intentions tap similar constructs, specifically, intentions to leave the organization and emotional attachment to the organization. Therefore, we reasoned it was logical that they should be related in the model. Finally, health satisfaction and job satisfaction were allowed to covary, given that these two types of satisfaction have previously been shown to be related (Cass, Siu, Faragher, & Cooper, 2003). In addition to these theoretical arguments, the standardized residuals and/or modification indices were highest for these three paths, further supporting their inclusion. Thus, these three paths were added to the original models, and the fit of the revised models was tested.

**Revised model.** The revision improved the model's fit indices, resulting in a  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 1.75, CFI of .97, RMSEA of .06, and SRMR of .05. All of the path coefficients were significant at the .01 or .05 level, except for the path from health satisfaction to affective commitment, which was not significant. The estimated coefficients for the revised model are represented in Figure 2. These results demonstrate good fit for the revised model.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the path coefficients from client gender context and client power to CSH were significant and positive, indicating a positive relationship between the percentage of clients who are men and frequency of CSH, as well as a positive relationship between perceived client power and frequency of CSH, supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Next, the data show that CSH was directly related to job and psychological outcomes, even when controlling for general job stress. Recall that Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c predicted that higher levels of CSH would be directly

related to reduced job and health satisfaction, as well as increased emotional distress. These hypotheses were supported, as seen in the path coefficients. Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c predicted that CSH would have an indirect negative impact on several job outcomes. Hypothesis 3a predicted that CSH would be negatively related to affective commitment through its effects on job and health satisfaction. This hypothesis was partially supported in that the effects were found for job but not health satisfaction (as can be seen in Figure 2). Hypothesis 3b was supported, as levels of CSH were found to have an indirect positive relationship with turnover intentions through both health and job satisfaction. Hypothesis 3c was also supported, with higher levels of CSH being related to increased employee withdrawal from clients through the effect of CSH on psychological distress. Additionally, higher levels of CSH were found to be directly related to increased withdrawal from clients.

## Discussion

Previous sexual harassment research has focused almost exclusively on intraorganizational sources of harassment, leaving the important issue of harassment from outside organizational walls unaddressed. To begin filling this void, we proposed an integrated model of antecedents and consequences, created a new measure of sexual harassment for the client context, and tested components of the model in Study 1. In support of our predictions, both power and gender composition of the client base affected incidence rates of CSH. Additionally, we documented some outcomes and potential costs of CSH. Study 1 showed that professional women who are

<sup>3</sup> As is standard in sexual-harassment research, job stress was included in the model in order to control for ordinary job stress and therefore prevent the effects of stress from being mistakenly imputed to harassment. A direct path was included from CSH to stress based on harassment's well-documented role as a stressor (Lyons, 2002; McDermut, Haaga, & Kirk, 2000; Rosell, Miller, & Barber, 1995). Stress was also allowed to covary with the outcome variables of turnover intentions, health satisfaction, and PTSD based on research illustrating that job stress also affects these variables (see Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Because the SEQ-C asks about harassment occurring in the last 2 years, we also tested the model by using only participants who had been in their current job for at least 2 years and found no differences in the results. Therefore, the results reported here do not exclude participants with less than 2-year job tenure.

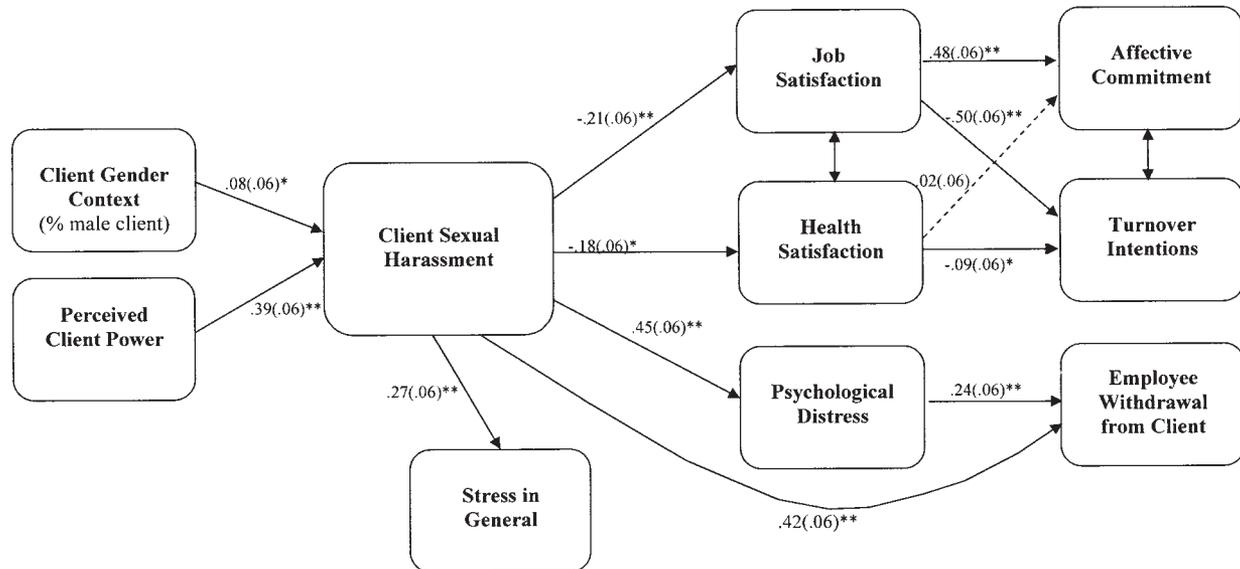


Figure 2. Model with revisions. Mplus estimates of initial structural model coefficients and their standard errors (in parentheses). \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

harassed by their clients have lower job and health satisfaction, experience more psychological stress, feel less attached to their organization on an affective level, and spend more time thinking about quitting. We also found that women who were harassed by clients tended to engage in withdrawal behaviors that could ultimately damage the organization's relationship with the client and possibly harm the women's careers. Clearly, CSH has important theoretical and practical importance for working women and organizations.

Nonetheless, this study is not without its limitations. The majority of the women in Study 1 were White, well educated, well compensated, and professional, raising the issue of whether the results found in this study are generalizable to other populations. Further, 38% of the participants were self-employed, which is not typical of the general population of working women. These women were more likely to be harassed than those who worked for other people, raising the possibility of factors unique to self-employed women's client relationships.

A second limitation is the possibility that self-selection bias occurred in our sample. The incidence rates of CSH were significantly higher than the typical rates found with intraorganizational harassment (86% compared with 40%–68%). Although this rate might very well accurately reflect the prevalence of CSH for professional women in male-dominated industries such as law and consulting, further study is necessary to see whether rates vary across sectors.

Finally, we did not examine CSH in conjunction with levels of sexual harassment by coworkers and supervisors. Because previous research has shown that intraorganizational harassment predicts many of the outcomes included in our model, we cannot definitively determine, based on this study, whether CSH has any impact above and beyond harassment from the inside. Put differently, it is unclear whether CSH accounts for unique variance in individual outcomes above and beyond that which is accounted for by intraorganizational harassment.

To address some of these limitations and lend further confidence to the findings of Study 1, we conducted a second study. We examined the question of whether CSH exhibits negative effects on outcomes above and beyond the effects of harassment from coworkers and supervisors.

*Hypothesis 4:* We hypothesized that CSH is a unique stressor for women that has effects on job satisfaction over and above those of intraorganizational harassment.

Further, the professional nature of the participants in Study 1 raised the question as to whether CSH is a problem unique to professional sectors. We argued that CSH and its negative outcomes apply beyond professional industries and is relevant in other service contexts where women have repeated contact with customers, such as grocery store clerks, wait staff, and so forth. Finally, we were also interested in examining CSH in a sample where self-selection based on harassment experiences was not a possibility (e.g., where harassment items were included as part of a nonharassment or gender-related survey).

## Study 2

### Participants

The participants for this study were employees in a large mid-Atlantic grocery store chain. There were 3,445 employee surveys returned out of 8,612 (40% response rate), including 2,519 female respondents from 773 different departments in 144 stores. In terms of age, 8% of the women were under 18, 18% were 18–22, 10% were 23–29, 17% were 30–39, and 46% were 40 or over. Forty-two percent of the participants were married, and 45% had children (with an average of 1.95 children). Ninety-two percent of the participants who reported their race were White, 4.8% were African American, 0.8% each were Asian and Hispanic, and 1.6% responded "other."

### The Survey and Measures

The measures for this study were included as part of a larger study that examined department-level issues. Participants completed this "Store Employee Survey," which covered a variety of topics, including leader behavior, climate, and teamwork. Because of the length of the survey, we were permitted to include only abbreviated harassment measures. Additionally, most of the measures were framed at the department level of analysis, and the only two at the individual level of analysis we could look at were job satisfaction and affective commitment. We chose to focus on job satisfaction as it was a proximal outcome variable in our model (affective commitment was an indirect outcome) and therefore would be expected to have a direct relationship with harassment. The surveys were distributed to the employees by the organization, who were given time to fill them out during working hours. Surveys were mailed back to the primary investigator to ensure confidentiality.

*Customer and intraorganizational harassment.* Intraorganizational harassment and CSH were measured by using parallel versions of the SEQ and SEQ-C. The measures were abbreviated to seven items each because of organizationally imposed time and space constraints. Because these measures were truncated versions of the scales, they provided conservative estimates of CSH and intraorganizational harassment (as variance was reduced by eliminating a number of the behavioral items). Sexual coercion items were not included because of company concerns about the legal sensitivity of these questions. Seven items were chosen to reflect the construct space of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention and for their high factor loadings in previous research. Three items related to unwanted sexual attention and four related to gender harassment were chosen (see Table 5). Both scales exhibited good reliability in this sample ( $\alpha_s = .85$  and  $.88$ , for CSH and intraorganizational harassment, respectively).

*Job satisfaction.* Global job satisfaction was measured by using the gender-neutral single-item Faces Scale (Dunham & Herman, 1975). Because of limited space, we were constrained to using a single-item measure. However, we did not believe that this was problematic from a reliability standpoint as Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy (1997) found in their meta-analysis (in which they used the correction for attenuation), that the minimum estimated reliability for single-item measures of satisfaction was close to .70 and

that single-item measures were highly correlated with scale measures of job satisfaction.

## Study 2: Analysis and Results

### Incidence of Sexual Harassment

Fifty percent of the women surveyed reported some form of sexual harassment by their customers, and 40% reported experiencing intraorganizational harassment. As in Study 1, there were significant differences in the levels of CSH depending on the woman's race, with minority women reporting significantly more sexual harassment by customers than White women,  $F(1, 2490) = 40.07, p < .001$  (Cohen's  $d = .34$ ).

### Consequence of CSH Controlling for Intraorganizational Harassment

As expected, CSH was found to be negatively related to job satisfaction ( $r = -.16, p < .001$ ). Additionally, we investigated whether CSH had effects beyond the effects of sexual harassment experienced from coworkers and managers. To this end, hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted. Client sexual harassment was found to have a significant effect on job satisfaction,  $F(1, 2472) = 12.625, \beta = -.08, \Delta R^2 = .01, p < .001$  (adjusted  $R^2 = .037$ ), even after controlling for internal sexual harassment. Thus, Hypothesis 4, that CSH accounts for unique variance in job satisfaction above and beyond sexual harassment by supervisors and coworkers, was supported.

### Discussion

The results of Study 2 give evidence that CSH is not just a phenomenon occurring with professional women, but that it occurs with frequency in this nonprofessional service industry as well. Additionally, this study greatly reduced the threat of self-selection biasing our results. Finally, we also found that CSH accounted for negative effects on job satisfaction beyond those accounted for by intraorganizational harassment.

We noted that the effect size found in Study 2 was small. However, we believe that this finding is important, regardless. It is well accepted that even small effect sizes can be of practical importance so long as they are widely prevalent (Pitzer, 1998), significantly above zero, and have the potential to cumulate (Abelson, 1985). As Abelson (1985) remarked, "One should not necessarily be scornful of miniscule value for percentage variance explanation, provided there is statistical assurance that these values are significantly above zero, and that the degree of potential cumulation is substantial" (p. 133).

Here, our effect size is significantly above zero, and CSH is prevalent (with 86% and 50% of the women in our samples experiencing some form of CSH in the last 2 years alone). Further, according to Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), barriers to women's career advancement occur according to the "tournament model," with small decrements/disadvantages accruing over time, resulting incrementally in women's lack of advancement. Given that job satisfaction is commonly known to be related to a host of important outcomes such as performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001) and turnover (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002), we argue that even small systematic decrements to women's job

Table 5  
Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Client Version Items Used  
in Study 2

In the last 2 years, how often have you been in a situation where a male customer
Unwanted sexual attention
... repeated requests for dates, drinks, etc., despite being told no?
... attempted to stroke, fondle, or kiss?
... touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?
Gender harassment
... treated you differently because of your sex?
... made offensive sexist remarks?
... made offensive remarks about appearance, body, or sexual activities?
... told offensive sexual stories or jokes?

satisfaction should have significant implications for women's career advancement in the long term.

### Overall Discussion

This research is of the first to show that CSH is an occupational hazard for women who work at the boundaries of organizations. Study 1 provided an integrated model of antecedents and consequence of CSH and illustrated that several aspects of the client context, namely client power and client gender context, were related to levels of CSH. Study 1 also documented several potential costs of CSH: lower job and health satisfaction, increased psychological distress, decreased organizational attachment, and increased intentions to quit. In addition, we illustrated the impact of CSH on employees' client interactions. Ironically, although the behaviors composing employee withdrawal from clients (such as not pursuing new business) might ultimately stop the harassment, they simultaneously might have serious negative consequences for women's careers to the extent that getting and keeping business is a key component of women's jobs in these industries. Additionally, Study 1 provided a validated measure of CSH (the SEQ-C), which was grounded in previous literature but also corroborated by the experiences of women who have been harassed by their clients. Finally, Study 2 showed that CSH is also a common occurrence in a nonprofessional context and that it causes harm above and beyond the effects of intraorganizational harassment. Taken together, both studies show the serious detrimental effects that CSH can have for both professional and nonprofessional women.

### Practical Implications

The findings in this study have implications both for organizations and for working women. It is a significant first step in raising awareness of CSH, which is important given that people may not be as attuned to harassment by clients as they are to intraorganizational harassment (Brady, 1997; Clancy, 1994; Stevens, 1994; Vaughn, 2002). This lack of awareness, combined with the importance and sensitivity of client relationships, may leave the onus of dealing with CSH predominantly on women's shoulders.

Given that CSH is prevalent, and that the number of client- and customer-related jobs is increasing, the negative consequences of CSH found in this research should be of concern to organizations, as CSH is exacting both job-related and psychological costs on its employees. CSH, in addition to intraorganizational harassment, appears to be a common and costly barrier to women's full participation in the workforce. For organizations committed to developing and retaining female talent, and increasing female representation in higher levels of the organization, the issue of harassment by clients is not one they can afford to overlook or ignore. Moreover, working women, especially those who deal with clients and customers on a continuous basis, need to be aware of the potential occupational hazard of CSH. It is important for women to be aware that harassment by clients is something they may likely face if they work in an industry with client/customer contact and be aware of the implications that has for their careers. Women should be particularly mindful of the gender composition of the client base and levels of client power, as we have shown that these variables predictably relate to levels of CSH.

Moreover, our findings have important policy implications. We have shown that the consequences of CSH are comparable to those found with intraorganizational harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) and that CSH occurs with similar frequency. However, relatively few court cases have been brought to date, with only about a dozen cases total as of 2002 (Vaughn, 2002), compared with the hundreds of intraorganizational harassment cases filed in federal district courts every year (based on a LexisNexis search). This dearth of litigation may be the result of employees' lack of awareness of the legal responsibility of employers, or perhaps women are simply less likely to complain about harassment by clients because of the complexities of client relationships. As one woman we interviewed in the pilot study stated,

If I go to [my boss] and complain about coworkers, there's a mechanism within the company to deal with that. You know, there are people that are HR or counselors or whatever who handle these kinds of things. . . . But in the client situation, there is no watch dog. There's no regulator. It's just you out there and you can't tell the client that they can't do things. . . . You try to defend yourself but because of the complexity of the relationship, you can't. I'd rather be harassed by a co-worker, it's easier to deal with.

The reasons for the lack of court cases being brought, considering the apparent prevalence of CSH, is an important empirical question that should be addressed. Whether employees are aware of the legal protections against CSH, and whether organizations afford protections against CSH similar to those they use against intraorganizational harassment, needs to be better understood in order to adequately deal with CSH.

### Future Research

This study also leaves some interesting questions unanswered. In Study 1, women who were self-employed were more likely to report being harassed. The reasons for and implications of this finding merit further exploration. It is possible that self-employed women are more directly and immediately reliant on their clients, putting women in a position of lesser power and, thus, leaving them more vulnerable to harassment. Further, the implications and burden of harassment may be different for those who are self-employed. The law requires employers to take "reasonable steps" to stop CSH [29 Code of Federal Regulations 1604.11(e)]. This burden falls on the employer, but, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, those who are self-employed are both the victim and the legally responsible party. Implications of the impact of self-employment on incidence levels and effects of harassment warrant additional investigation.

Further research is needed to examine CSH's incidence rates, how they vary across occupations, and how they compare with rates of intraorganizational harassment. Rates of CSH in Study 1 were markedly higher than those found in previous intraorganizational harassment research (40%–68%; Munson, Miner, & Hulin, 2001), and there are a number of possible explanations for this finding. For example, it is possible that the rates were the result of self-selection bias. Alternatively, the higher rate may have been due, at least in part, to the fact that many women in Study 1 were in traditionally male-dominated professional occupations (e.g., law or consulting). In fact, the client bases of the women in Study 1 were male dominated (35% reported that 80% or more of their

clients were men), which has been shown to predict harassment in intraorganizational research (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986) and was a predictor CSH in our study. Only by replication in another professional sample, where the chance of self-selection is reduced, can we know for sure whether the high rates are a self-selection issue or the function of the industries and positions the women in our sample were in.

This research illuminates a number of other interesting avenues for future inquiry. For example, does organizational climate in regard to intraorganizational sexual harassment "spill over" to affect the way employees are treated by clients? As discussed previously, we posit that clients may pick up on harassment being permissible within an organization and therefore feel a license to behave in kind. If in fact organizational climate does have an effect on CSH, it would be useful to examine conditions under which this spillover can occur (e.g., perhaps it occurs only where business with clients is conducted at the woman's place of business). Additionally, as posited in the model, other organizational climate variables may affect CSH, such as the strength of the service pressure climate, where a strong focus on service or sales at any cost may put women in a particularly vulnerable position, subjecting them to increased harassment by customers. Indeed, a woman interviewed for this study stated that when she went to her colleagues for advice about a client who was making unwelcome romantic advances, they encouraged her to use the situation to increase sales: "My affiliates told me to milk it. . .the attitude there was do whatever it takes [to make the sale]. They people hustle." It seems likely that women in such climates would be more vulnerable to CSH.

Another crucial area for future research is the issue of reporting CSH. The literature about reporting intraorganizational harassment indicates that reporting harassment experiences does not improve, and sometimes worsens, outcomes for the victim (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002; Lee, Heilmann, & Near, 2004). Additionally, various variables (e.g., perpetrator rank and the victim's subjective appraisal of the threat of the experience) have been found to be determinants of reporting (Bergman et al., 2002). Given the added complexity of client relationships, reporting harassment in the client context is an important area for future research. Specifically, better understanding the antecedents of reporting is critical to help organizations navigate the difficult task of protecting their employees as required by law, while simultaneously protecting their relationships with their clients.

The sexual harassment of men by customers and clients should also be investigated. Previous research regarding intraorganizational harassment of males has been relatively scarce (Stockdale, Gandolfo-Berry, Schneider, & Cao, 2004), partly because their experiences have been found to be significantly different from those of women (e.g., men are more likely to experience same-sex harassment, Magley et al., 1999; and tend to label fewer behaviors as harassment, Riger, 1991). However, research has also found that, at least with regard to more severe forms of harassment, men experience comparable negative consequences. Therefore, although the topic of the harassment of males was not the focus of this study, it will be important to similarly investigate the harassment of men in the client context to ascertain the nature of such harassment and determine its personal and professional costs.

## Conclusion

Although barriers to the advancement of women in the workplace have been given significant attention in the academic press, the obstacles considered have been almost exclusively those within the organization, even though employees are increasingly in contact with and reliant on clients and customers. Our evidence indicates that harassment of women by their clients and customers is prevalent and represents a major barrier to women's success that has been overlooked in the scholarly literature. Our CSH measure, theoretical model, and findings can help open the door to further study of this important social and legal issue.

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