

Female Non-Resistance to Sexual Harassment

-- An Evolutionary Psychology Perspective

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Abstract: Sexual harassment is a pervasive problem that affects individuals in a variety of social contexts, especially in the workplace and public spaces. Researcher has examined the complex phenomenon of women's non-resistance to sexual harassment and explore in depth the psychological, sociocultural and reproductive factors that lead women to not actively oppose or confront sexual harassment. Drawing on both evolutionary and survival perspectives, the paper explores the complex interplay between reproductive strategies, survival motivations, and social norms. Through the survey-based approach, we qualify the relationship between the women's varying responses to sexual harassment and harasser's social-economic status and physical appearance, taking into account scenarios in the workplace, campus, and public spaces. The results showed that women's resistance to sexual harassment changed with the various degrees of social status and appearance of the harasser. The implications of this research extend to understanding gender dynamics, workplace policies, and the social impact of sexual harassment. The study also acknowledges the limitations of sample representation and cultural context, providing avenues for future research on this important and sensitive topic. By revealing the multifaceted nature of non-resistance, it helps to understand women's experiences and decisions more fully in the face of sexual harassment.

Keywords: Evolutionary Psychology, Sexual Harassment, Non-Resistant behavior

1. Introduction

The term "Sexual harassment" grew out of an awareness-raising course of Lin Farley in 1974, and it is a widespread phenomenon, especially at workplaces or public spaces. United States Merit Systems Protection Board conducted a study in 1987. Government workers reported that the majority of women experienced harassment, and they experienced frequent or repeated stress. People are used to

hearing inappropriate sexual jokes, and 54% of those who are being forced to do sexual things said that it happens more than once [1]. Women around the world appeal to make strong laws to protect themselves. In India, the Supreme Court took an action, they established the framework of the law for the sexual harassment happens at workplace. After that, they applied this law in Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, this event is a landmark in the journey of protect female right [2].

Sexual harassment jeopardizes women's physical and mental health, victims who suffered sexual harassment can develop anxiety, depression, insomnia, nausea and sexual dysfunction. In fact, sexual violence can have long-term effects on victims. According to research done by RAINN organization [3], they found the chances of someone having thoughts of suicide or feeling depressed increase after someone is sexually hurt. About 94% of women who are raped experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during the two weeks following the rape, and 33% of women who are raped contemplate suicide. Moreover, sexual harassment happens at work, it tends to bring psychological traumas towards the victims of those harassments. Some women who suffered sexual assault decide to report their traumatic experience to protect themselves, they expect society or law can give an impartial judgement, although they win the lawsuit, they are still at risks of losing their job. For instance, in interviews, women who worked at Fox said they didn't complain to human resources because they feared they would be fired [4]. Therefore, their decline in social status and damage to interpersonal relationships could pose barriers to their future job finding process. Instead, if they did not report it, they can maintain their current position and social status.

Based on the situation female are being harassed, there are cases where male's power and social status are higher than female, and the influences of collectivism could further increase the chance of non-resistance behavior. At the same time, a male's appearance has the impact of influencing women's decisions. In collectivistic societies where people prioritize group thinking, the victims of sexual harassment might choose to prioritize their own reputation. For the same reason, divorce or separation could be harmful to one's reputation and may not be seen as acceptable in these societies. These factors above can make it more likely for women to stay in abusive relationships [5]. Emma Dalton has talked about the issue of Japanese women politicians being harassed. She says that women all over the world are punished for speaking up about harassment by men and thinks that Japan is not any different. They not only will get in trouble, but also don't have anywhere to go [6]. There are so many examples of the negative impact brought by complaint, causing women to be more likely to adopt non-resistance behavior. Therefore, the subject of this paper is to find the reasons and explore how does non-resistance behavior forms.

1.1. Definition

Psychologically, sexual harassment is defined as unwelcoming behavior with a sexual intention that is threatening and offensive to the recipient [7]. Under the US, UK, and European laws, sexual harassment is perceived as a form of "sex discrimination" [8].

There is visual, verbal, non-verbal, and physical harassment. The first type, visual harassment, is characterized by showing recipients sexually offensive messages, pictures, and videos. Verbal harassment is limited to the harasser's choice of words when speaking with the recipient. Non-verbal harassment includes staring and body gestures that are deemed threatening and uncomfortable by the recipient. Physical harassment is defined as making any sexually oriented physical contact with the recipient without the recipient's consent. Physical harassment could be organized into a variety of degrees, ranging from minor body touch to rape.

Non-resistance refers to a psychological and behavioral response exhibited by victims of sexual harassment, in which they do not actively oppose or confront unwanted advances, suggestive behavior, or inappropriate behavior. This reaction may manifest as a lack of verbal or physical resistance, avoidance of confrontation, or failure to immediately object to the harasser's actions. Non-resistance

may stem from a variety of factors, including social, cultural, psychological, and evolutionary influences, and may influence a victim's decision to report or disclose harassment.

1.2. Theory

The paper envisions two main perspectives that explain women's reluctance to deal with incidents of sexual harassment. Initial ideas focused on preserving their potential reproductive value. By avoiding public reactions or disclosures related to incidents of sexual harassment, women are trying to preempt potential doubts about their loyalty. This doubt, in turn, may exacerbate paternal uncertainty in potential male partners, potentially undermining women's desire to reproduce and thus their prospects for more favorable long-term mating. The second view concerns the safety and protection of persons. It is important to note that individuals who commit sexual harassment may have a higher social or economic status, using these attributes to their advantage. In addition, physical abilities exhibited by certain individuals, whether they are familiar with them or not, may raise concerns about physical harm. In response, women may choose not to resist in order to ensure their personal safety.

Sexual strategy theory states that individuals have adopted specific behaviors and responses that have optimized their reproductive success. It distinguishes between short-term strategies, which focus on immediate mating opportunities, and long-term strategies aimed at obtaining stable, high-quality partners. Short-term mating behavior refers to reproductive strategies that focus on immediate contact without long-term commitment. The focus is on maximizing immediate reproductive opportunities while minimizing potential risks. Individuals tend to engage in behaviors designed for immediate gain and generally do not have a significant commitment to the partner involved. This strategy is driven by the imperative to pass on genetic material quickly. Long-term mating behaviors include seeking stable, committed relationships with the goal of co-raising offspring [9].

From the male perspective, there is the prominent factor of "paternity uncertainty". Men often assume the role of providing resources for long-term partners and potential offspring, so there is a great deal of concern about the possibility of inadvertently raising other men's children. In this case, revealing that a potential partner has been harassed increases concern. This uncertainty stems from a historical context in which society places an extreme value on female chastity and virginity. This historical context has had a profound impact, and even in contemporary times, some men still place a high value on the virginity of potential partners.

Also, victims might perceive risks to accessing necessary resources (e.g., safety, social support) if they resist harassment, leading to non-resistance as a strategic response to safeguard these resources. Understanding the resource-driven motivations behind non-resistance unveils the socio-economic pressures women navigate when making decisions about confronting sexual harassment incidents.

The good genes theory proposed that due to human's reproductive nature, women would prefer a mate who possesses indicators that they are in good state, and that makes it more likely their children will be in good state [10]. Those indicators could be a male's physical appearance, masculinity, and social status. A study by David Buss in 1989 [11] have shown that compared to men, women generally value social status as a more important demand when choosing a mate, since individuals with more wealth and better physical appearance show more reproductive successes. When encountering sexual harassment, the recipients could also take the harasser's status into consideration, and a high-status harasser may lead to non-resistance on the recipients' side.

Why do some men choose to sexually harass women? The mating opportunity cost hypothesis suggested that it is because those harassers aim to gain sexual opportunities or experiences at a lower cost. Through sexual harassment, harassers can look for a potential mate through lower cost. If the harassers physically harassed the recipient, to the extent of rape, the perpetrator then earned a reproductive opportunity with the lower effort and lower devotion compared to romantic relationships. It is the male's reproductive nature that contributed to the numerous cases of sexual harassment.

The dilemma of indirect speech and plausible deniability is fundamental in understanding female non-resistance from a survival perspective. Minor physical contact and ambiguous speech and action are all a part of plausible deniability, leading harassment recipients into a state of confusion, unable to determine the harasser's real intention. Recipients often would not anticipate any sexual harassment, and when encountering work-place harassment, any resistance could cause harm to the recipient's career advancement and reputation [12]. Since the victims could not gather any evidence due to the existence of indirect speech and ambiguous actions, if they reacted radically while the mistaken harassers had good intentions, then it would negatively impact their reputation. Reputation and job advancement are closely linked to survival opportunities in a modern society, which may cause the recipient to show non-resistance to minor harassment.

The fear for violent retaliation provides another perspective on why female non-resistance occur. Research by Todorov [13] on people's perception of trustworthiness through facial appearance supported the violent retaliation prediction. People would show avoidance actions towards those with a more angry or less trustworthy facial expression [13]. In the case of sexual harassment, the recipients could possibly show less resistance to those who seemed to be less trustworthy due to fear or avoidance emotions. When facing a harasser who has an angrier appearance, the recipients may consider the possibility of encountering violent retaliation once they resisted. In order to ensure their survival opportunity, the recipient would eventually execute non-resistant behaviors.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The survey data is randomly collected from 2000 female college students from East Asian countries. The participants' experiences with sexual harassment may vary, including haven't been sexually harassed before, being sexually harassed with low, moderate, or high frequency (Schneider et al., 1997b).

A survey could accomplish the goal of collecting large amounts of data conveniently. A broad sample size could effectively eliminate small biases, eventually leading to reliable results. The sample obtained only have limited geographical significance, since it meant to represent the East-Asian continent as a whole, with no distinctions for each individual country.

2.2. Measure

Before doing the survey, participants are informed that sexual harassment is topic of anonymous survey. They are free to leave if they find it unpleasant. When interacting with the survey, participants will be randomly assigned to six different versions of surveys in order to prevent them from discovering variables thus leading to biased result. And they are required to read a paragraph of description of the circumstance. After reading, they will be given options to choose their response to four different questions of different levels of sexual harassment. They can only choose one answer.

2.3. Procedure

The study applies surveys to develop research. The survey was designed to assess whether females will respond to sexual harassment differently due to reproductive and survival factors. How to examine that reproduction and survival will impact whether female will act out? The approach is to analyze how social status and appearance of perpetrator, which indicate resources of reproduction and survival, influence how females react. Six different versions of surveys are conducted. The six surveys were divided into two groups, distinguished by physical attractiveness. Perpetrators from one

group score higher on the physical attractiveness scale than the other group's perpetrators, who score lower.

Each group contains three surveys that each address distinct scenarios respectively, including campus, workplace, and public area. The perpetrators in both the work and school settings were individuals with higher social status, such as professors and managers. Due to the theories mentioned above, females should be less likely to resist when encountering high-status harassers. More than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault [14]. And around 1 in 28 US workers report experiencing workplace sexual harassment annually, yet only 1 in 11,000 file formal sexual harassment charges with the EEOC [15]. In contrast, authority differences in public scenes like buses and subways often are similar, which are hard for the victims to perceive. By contrasting these three questions, the study can find out whether social status will affect how females react to sexual harassment. To further explain, the six different surveys involve: high physical attractiveness and workplace, high physical attractiveness and campus, low physical attractiveness and campus and so on.

On the survey page, a brief summary of the scenario will be provided in the first paragraph, along with details of the character, the male harasser, and the female victim. The narrative is told in the third person, and both the victim and the perpetrator characters were invented. Under the description of circumstance are questions designed according to different severity of sexual harassment, and four options for different responses. Different kinds of sexual includes verbal/written, physical, non-verbal, and visual. All the options will be set up in four qualifiable levels ranging from positive reaction to negative response, including compliance, remain silent, leave the scene, and act out. By studying how positively or negatively the participants responded, influences of different scenarios can be investigated.

3. Predicted Findings

This research predicts that women's attitudes toward sexual harassment change with the status and appearance of the sexual harasser.

From the perspective of physical appearance, women are more likely to trust and tolerate men with good physical appearance. Good-looking men are thought to have good genes for physical appearance, and if a woman chooses such men as her mate, the probability of her offspring having good looks greatly increases, so if they see sexual harassment as a potential way to obtain good genes, they will not refuse. Due to the good genes' theory, when women are less attractive than their harassers, they are less likely to tell others that they have been harassed by them, and it is generally assumed that attractive people will be less likely to actively harass less attractive people. This might cause the situation that people been sexually harassed by attractive people worry about get into the bad public opinion environment where no one believes and supports, so women may choose to hide the truth and not fight against the sexual harassment in order to avoid more trouble or blame from bystanders. Therefore, researchers believe that as the appearance level and appearance conditions of the harasser increase, the probability that women are willing to openly say that they are sexually harassed by them will decrease, which is due to the desire to reproduce good offspring and the choice to obtain social recognition and not be excluded by the group.

Think in terms of status. Those at the top usually determine the social resources available to those at the bottom, and if people with lower social status go against the will of those at the top, it means standing up to sexual harassment in this case their decisions will affect the survival of those at the bottom. Therefore, when women are sexually harassed by high-status people, they will not choose to resist to maintain their social status and obtain stable social resources. At the same time, those at top have more social resources, can provide a good growth environment for their offspring, and have a high probability of cultivating excellent offspring. When women have the probability of obtaining a

good growth environment for their offspring through such a way, this will be another reason for them not to resist. Therefore, researchers think that women's desire to resist decreases as the harasser's status rises.

4. Implications and Discussion

From a male perspective, they generally believe that when a woman feels sexually harassed, she chooses to stand up to it. Therefore, there are men who think that when women don't come forward and report sexual harassment, women aren't sexually harassed. Is someone who has never experienced sociosexual behaviors as threatening or as unequal treatment able to understand why they are experienced as such by others [16]. From this case, research given the possible reasons why females do not resist sexual harassment can help females who are being sexually harassed but choose not to speak out get more support rather than ignorance or blame from society. This also helps men to understand women better, so that men learn to avoid falling into the embarrassing situation of being considered as a harasser. Also, it could provide some value on legislative decisions in a sexual harassment case, to make the harassers still get legally accountable even if the victim chooses not to resist or refuse directly. This study contributes to a situation of harmony in society and less conflict between the sexes caused by sexual harassment.

4.1. Strength of this research

This research does inform the participants of the purpose of the experiment, which takes care of the participants' right to know. At the same time, the study failed to answer that when a question makes the participants feel uncomfortable, they can choose not to answer the question. This research explores the factors why women choose not to fight against sexual harassment from the female perspective.

4.2. Limitations

This research only recruits females instead of recruiting participants from both gender population. Also, the sample was selected by intramural recruitment which could be a source of bias. The scenes that this research has set, and the virtual picture presented to the experimenter as an example of a variable used to visualize the simulation are all set according to the social background of East Asia, so in other social backgrounds with different aesthetics or values, the results of this set of theories may be different. It is unrepresentative and cannot be generalized to a large population. Because the experiment being set up is in a simulated scenario, some parts may be different from the reality, such as the attitude of the harasser and the words of the harasser after being found, as well as the pressure released by the harasser on the harasser. This research may not have fully included all variables that possibly occur in reality that led to the lack of ample mundane realism.

Future research could take the male perspective on how to define their behavior as sexual harassment or flirting as a study and clarify the nature of their behavior will help them exercise their rights without causing distress to others. It is also interesting to research which of the factors that make women not resist sexual harassment is taking greater percentage and it is a good perspective to determine whether the reason for their behavior is survival or reproduction.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding women's non-resistance to sexual harassment, shedding light on the multifaceted factors at play. By examining the interplay between reproductive strategies, survival motivations, and social norms, this study offers valuable insights into understanding the complexities of women's responses to sexual harassment. The findings

highlight the need for a deeper societal understanding of these issues and the imperative for policies and support systems that empower and protect individuals facing sexual harassment. This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of women's experiences in the face of sexual harassment, ultimately aiming to foster a safer and more equitable society.

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