

## What Is So Bad About a Little Name-Calling? Negative Consequences of Gender Harassment for Overperformance Demands and Distress

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Few studies have investigated why harassment has negative effects on women's well-being. The authors proposed that, for women working in traditionally male occupations, gender harassment (GH) causes overperformance demands (OPD), which lead to psychological distress. This mediated model was strongly supported for 262 female police officers but, as proposed, was not supported for male officers ( $N = 315$ ). For men, levels of GH and OPD were lower than for women, and GH was not a significant predictor of OPD. Harassing behaviors thus had different consequences for women and men. A lack of perceived support for equal deployment of women police was associated with OPD for women, and family  $\rightarrow$  work conflict was a significant predictor of OPD for both men and women.

Sexual harassment is a continuing problem for women in organizations. Its negative effects on individuals' health and well-being are well documented (e.g., Barling et al., 1996; Brown, Campbell, & Fife-Shaw, 1995; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman, & Drasgow, 1999; Loy & Stewart, 1984; Ragins & Scandura, 1995; Schnieder, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Organizational costs such as absence, turnover, lawsuits, and impaired performance have also been demonstrated (e.g., United States Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1987). However, although there is accumulating evidence about the negative effects of sexual harassment, less attention has been given to the question of why these effects occur. That is, the psychological processes through which harassment leads to negative outcomes for employees are not well understood.

In the present article, we investigate how gender

harassment affects employees' psychological well-being in a context in which women work in traditional male roles (i.e., police work). Gender harassment, one of the three types of sexual harassment identified by Fitzgerald and colleagues (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995), is conduct that conveys hostile and degrading attitudes about women. As such, it may or may not be sexualized, and it may be directed at women generally or at a specific woman (Piotrkowski, 1998). Examples of gender harassment include making negative remarks or jokes about women and questioning women's competence in performing their job.

We focus our investigation on understanding the effects of gender harassment for several reasons. First, it is the most common form of harassment. In a cross-national study of Canadian and American women and women from the former Soviet Union, verbal types of gender harassment such as personal jokes and comments were by far the most frequent type of harassment (Gruber, Smith, & Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1996). Similar findings have been obtained in surveys of French, Spanish, and English women (Rubenstein, 1992). Second, this type of harassment can be damaging. In one of the few systematic studies of its effects in the workplace, Piotrkowski (1998) found that gender harassment of women office workers was associated with job dissatisfaction and distress. Gender harassment might be even more damaging in contexts in which women carry out traditionally male jobs or are in the minority, which is indeed when sexual harassment is most likely to occur (Carothers & Crull, 1984; Lengnick-

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Hall, 1995). In such contexts, it has been argued that gender-harassing behaviors can serve to undermine women's status and maintain male-dominated cultures (Collier, 1995; Nicolson, 1997). Consistent with this argument, in a study of 22 African American firefighters, Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) found that gender harassment undermined women's feelings of acceptance and their organizational self-esteem. Likewise, Conley (cited in Morris 1994, p. 111), writing about women in medicine, described gender harassment as being "like a ton of feathers" that is just as devastating as other forms because of its frequency and pervasiveness.

A third reason for focusing on gender harassment is that, although regarded by legal and policy statements as less severe than other forms of harassment, this type of conduct can interfere with a woman's ability to do her job and therefore can meet the legal standard for employment discrimination. A final reason for focusing on gender harassment is that, despite the evidence suggesting that it can be damaging to individuals, and its potential legal consequences, gender-harassing behaviors are not necessarily seen as negative. The name-calling, jokes, and other such behaviors that constitute gender harassment are often construed by perpetrators as "just male fun" (Stanko, 1988, p. 98) or considered part of ordinary interactions between men and women (see Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997). Studies comparing men's and women's perceptions have shown that men are less likely to consider gender-harassing behaviors to be harassing (Burgess & Borgida, 1996; Tata, 1993).

One explanation as to why the effects of gender harassment are underestimated is that the psychological processes through which it leads to harmful outcomes are not well understood. The aim of this study was to investigate the processes by which gender harassment affects the psychological well-being of women working in roles traditionally carried out by men (in this case, women police officers). This study provides a starting point for understanding similar processes that might explain the damaging consequences of other forms of harassment that are not investigated here. We focus on a concept called *overperformance demands*, which highlights the way women's performance and capability are perceived and judged within the organization as a key reason that gender harassment has negative consequences for women. We describe this construct and its hypothesized links with gender harassment and psychological distress next. We then describe an expanded model that aims to strengthen the tests of the hypoth-

eses and broaden our understanding of the key constructs.

We focus our study on women because harassment most commonly occurs for women (Gutek, 1985; USMSPB, 1987) and because harassment has been shown to have more damaging job and psychological effects for women than for men (Barling et al., 1996). However, an added contribution of our study is that we include men. We investigate the effects on men of those workplace behaviors known to constitute gender harassment for women, which is an issue that has received little or no research attention. We deliberately use the same behaviors in our assessment of gender harassment so that we can test whether these acts are experienced differently for men and women. Including men also helps to demonstrate the discriminant validity of the findings.

### Concept of Overperformance Demands

Overperformance demands refers to an individual's perception that they need to overperform to gain acceptance and recognition within the workplace. Overperforming includes, for example, constantly trying to prove oneself and putting in excessive effort. The term *demands* is used to indicate that overperformance demands is a psychological state in which an individual feels pressure, or the need, to overperform to be accepted and recognized, rather than being a behavioral construct involving the display of overperformance behaviors.

There are at least three theoretical frameworks that inform the construct of overperformance demands. The first is equity theory, which posits that inequity occurs when a person perceives that the ratio of his or her inputs (e.g., education, effort) to outputs or outcomes (e.g., salary, promotion, responsibilities) is unequal compared with the ratio of others' inputs to outcomes (Adams, 1965). A situation in which the person feels his or her input-to-outcome ratio is less than others could arise because the person's inputs are less valued, are judged inappropriately, or are unfairly constrained. One response to such perceived inequity is to reduce inputs or to withdraw (Adams, 1965), but another is to redouble efforts and increase inputs to gain similar outputs (Cosier & Dalton, 1983). A feeling that one needs to overperform could thus be a response to perceived inequity, arising because others unfairly judge inputs. Women working in traditionally male jobs, for example, might believe their inputs are equal to those of their male colleagues, but these inputs are less valued or judged unfairly compared with those of men. This perception

leads women to feel they need to overperform to achieve the same level of outcomes as men. In the context of police work, in which women have actively chosen to enter and remain in a male-dominated profession, overperformance demands is likely to be a more meaningful mediating construct than withdrawal.

A second relevant theoretical construct is self-efficacy, which refers to an employee's belief in his or her capability of carrying out a particular role or task (Bandura, 1982). Low self-efficacy means that individuals perceive their own inputs to be less than others' and this may heighten the feeling that they need to overperform. The same argument can be made for concepts such as self-esteem and fear of failure. Low self-efficacy, low self-confidence, and fear of failure are all possible determinants of overperformance demands, explaining why individuals can be anxious about the need to perform at higher levels than colleagues.

A third theoretical perspective is provided by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals define themselves as members of social categories and strive to maintain self-worth by belonging to groups that compare favorably with other groups. Jobs traditionally viewed as male are most likely to incorporate social categories based on gender. For example, if the general social category of "police officer" is perceived as having male attributes or being exclusive to men, then male officers will perceive female officers as out-group members. From a social identity perspective, male officers may perceive female officers to be members of a lower status social category (female police officer) and seek to maintain the higher status of their group through processes such as biased perceptions of the out-group (Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993) and harassment (O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000). If female officers perceive themselves to be members of a lower status social category, social identity theory predicts that they will be motivated to engage in strategies to become members of the high-status group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). In the face of biased perceptions of performance and exclusion from key status-enhancing activities, women might feel they need to increase their performance levels on dimensions important for the status of the dominant social group. Under these circumstances, we expect that women will be concerned about the level of performance required to be an accepted member of the social category of police officer.

Overperformance demands is also related to what has been referred to as overcompensation in two

studies of women in traditional male jobs; that is, a women believing that they need to overcompensate to prove their capability to male coworkers and supervisors (Goldenhar, Swanson, Hurrell, Ruder, & Deddens, 1998; Johnson, 1991). Overcompensation has also been shown to occur in other contexts, such as a study showing that heavyweight people used a number of strategies to compensate for the prejudice they experienced (e.g., Miller & Myers, 1998). We do not use the term *overcompensation* in this study for two reasons. First, the term implies a behavioral focus, whereas overperformance demands is a psychological variable in which the individual perceives a need to overperform to be accepted or recognized. Second, overcompensation has a different meaning in the equity literature, referring to a situation in which a person perceives that the ratio of his or her outcomes to inputs and the ratio of others' outcomes to inputs are unequal in the person's favor (Adams, 1965).

#### Salience of Overperformance Demands for Women in Nontraditional Roles

Members of an out-group at work are likely to be particularly vulnerable to experiencing overperformance demands because their performance is often judged differently, and less fairly, from those of the dominant group. In a review of literature on performance appraisal, Landy and Farr (1980; see also Nieva & Gutek, 1981) found that women tend to receive less favorable performance evaluations than their male counterparts in jobs traditionally carried out by men. In the masculinized context of police work, in which male officers have traditionally been hostile to women's entry into what is seen as a man's world (Heidensohn, 1992; Jones, 1986), biased evaluations of women's performance are possible. Some male officers strongly adhere to the view that women cannot perform all policing tasks, especially those related to violence (Heidensohn, 1992). These stereotypes can be reflected in the differential deployment of women, such as not assigning female police officers to dangerous situations, doubling up women on patrol duties, or excluding women from specialist jobs (Brown, Maidment, & Bull, 1992; Coffey, Brown, & Savage, 1992; Heidensohn, 1992). Given this context, women are likely to perceive that their inputs into the job are undervalued compared with those of men, resulting in a feeling that they need to increase their inputs, or overperform, to gain equal recognition and acceptance among members of the

high-status group. A work environment in which women's capability to carry out the role is questioned might also lead to women having lower self-efficacy and a greater fear of failure than men in the same setting, which in turn could lead to overperformance demands. We therefore expect that, in the police context, overperformance demands will be a salient issue for women.

Particular situations are likely to exacerbate levels of overperformance demands for women within this context. Our core focus in this study is on gender harassment. We propose that gender harassment will enhance overperformance demands, which in turn will be associated with psychological distress. The arguments behind this proposition are described next. We then outline an expanded model that considers additional predictors of overperformance demands, examines gender differences, and includes controls.

### Overperformance Demands, Gender Harassment, and Psychological Distress

#### *Gender Harassment and Overperformance Demands*

We hypothesize that gender harassment will be positively associated with overperformance demands for women (Hypothesis 1a). Gender harassing behaviors often directly undermine performance (Collier, 1995) and thus devalue women's inputs into the job. Indeed, Schultz (1998) argued that the main function of harassment is to undermine women's actual or perceived competence so as to preserve job segregation. Women's performance can also be undermined indirectly by gender harassment. So-called harmless joking and teasing can make gender salient and exaggerate gender differences, thereby reminding women that they are members of an out-group who are not welcome or accepted in the workplace (Schultz, 1988; Stanko, 1988; Wise & Stanley, 1987). Collier (1995) stated: "whatever women are, however good they are at their work they are first and foremost women . . . harassment ensures that they don't forget it" (p. 30). Evidence also suggests that harassment can lower women's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Collier, 1995; USMSPB, 1987; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1997), which can result in women perceiving their inputs to the role as of less value. Lowered self-efficacy and other such changes could also ultimately result in a decline in real performance, that is, a situation in which women's inputs are less effective. Overperformance demands might then occur because women worry that their detriment in

performance will lead to negative personal consequences and perpetuate some men's view that women are not capable of doing the job.

In summary, we propose that gender harassment is likely to be associated with overperformance demands for women working in traditional male occupations. Gender harassment often involves behaviors that directly or indirectly aim to undermine women's performance and devalue their contribution and can lead to a decreased confidence in performance or an actual detriment in performance. The net effect is that women feel they need to overperform to be accepted or recognized in the workplace.

#### *Overperformance Demands and Psychological Distress*

We hypothesize that overperformance demands will be associated with psychological distress (Hypothesis 1b). In an investigation of stress among female construction workers, the degree to which women felt they had to constantly prove themselves to their male coworkers and supervisors was a strong predictor of psychological symptoms (Goldenhar et al., 1998). There is also evidence within disciplines such as sport psychology that anxiety about performance can be stressful (e.g., Hanton & Jones, 1993), and qualitative research suggests that women police officers experience distress because of worries about the way their performance is perceived (Heidensohn, 1992; Johnson, 1991).

#### *Mediated Model*

The above hypotheses propose that for women gender harassment will be positively associated with overperformance demands (Hypothesis 1a) and that overperformance demands will be positively associated with psychological distress (Hypothesis 1b). We further propose that the effects of gender harassment on psychological distress are mediated through overperformance demands (Hypothesis 1c). Thus, we propose that one reason that gender harassment causes psychological harm for women is that it escalates overperformance demands.

#### Additional Predictors of Overperformance Demands for Women

Discriminatory processes other than gender harassment could escalate overperformance demands for women. To examine the influence of such processes,

and to disentangle their effects on overperformance demands from gender harassment, we included in our study two additional predictors: nonacceptance of women police and family-work conflict. The first of these concerns the extent to which it is believed that male officers accept the full and equal deployment of women police officers. As described earlier, many men have traditionally believed that women police officers should not be deployed to deal with potentially violent situations. It is likely that there will be variations across the organization in the degree to which women's role as a police officer is accepted. The less it is believed that men support equal deployment, the more likely women will feel their inputs are undervalued or that they are members of a low-status group, and the more likely that women's self-confidence will be reduced. We therefore propose that the perceived nonacceptance of women police will predict overperformance demands for women (Hypothesis 2a).

We also hypothesize that family → work conflict, the extent to which family responsibilities interfere with work, will predict overperformance demands for women (Hypothesis 2b). Much research has shown that family → work conflict is associated with psychological distress (Frone, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Vinokur, Pierce, & Buck, 1999). One consequence of family → work conflict could be that individuals feel they are putting in less to the job, or might be perceived as putting in less, because family responsibilities reduce the amount of time they can spend at work. Individuals with family → work conflict might then feel the need to compensate by overperforming during the time they are at work. Frone et al. (1992) also suggested that family → work conflict might represent a threat to one's job-related self-identity and self-efficacy because it suggests one is unable to manage one's family demands effectively. As described earlier, threats to identity and low self-efficacy are likely to drive overperformance demands. We therefore propose that family → work conflict will be associated with overperformance demands. In summary, inclusion in the model of nonacceptance of women police and family → work conflict can help to establish the validity of the overperformance demands measure and will also control for two important alternative hypothesized sources of overperformance demands when investigating how the latter is affected by gender harassment.

### Gender Differences and Similarities

Because of women's minority status within a masculinized context that has historically been hostile to

their entry, we predict that women police officers will experience higher levels of gender harassment (Hypothesis 3a) and higher levels of overperformance demands (Hypothesis 3b) than their male colleagues. We also propose that gender harassment will be more strongly associated with overperformance demands for women than for men (Hypothesis 3c). For men, who are members of the dominant culture, joking, teasing, and other such behavior by colleagues and supervisors are much less likely to be experienced as undermining and demeaning. Indeed, these behaviors might not be experienced as harassment. Consistent with this notion, Barling et al. (1996) found that sexual harassment was significantly more strongly related to negative mood and turnover intentions for women than for men.

Although we hypothesize that women will experience higher levels of overperformance demands, we propose that overperformance demands will be stressful for both men and women. That is, we hypothesize that the relationship between overperformance demands and psychological distress will be the same for both samples (Hypothesis 3d).

In addition, we hypothesize that nonacceptance of women police will have little impact on men's overperformance demands (Hypothesis 3e) but that family → work conflict will be associated with overperformance demands for men as well as for women (Hypothesis 3f). Evidence suggests that family → work conflict is associated with general psychological distress for both men and women (Frone et al., 1992). Therefore, men who experience high levels of family → work conflict were also expected to worry their inputs were less, or seen to be less, and therefore perceive the need to overperform.

### Controls: Background Factors, Unwanted Sexual Attention, and Intrinsic Job Satisfaction

We included a series of background variables as controls (age, rank, marital status, and education) because of their potential associations with key variables in the study. Some of these background factors can vary as a function of gender within police settings (e.g., women police officers tend to be younger and lower in rank than their male colleagues; Brown et al., 1995), and some relate to other key variables within the study (e.g., age has also been shown to be negatively related to sexual harassment; Lengnick-Hall, 1995). In addition, it is plausible to expect that some background factors might be associated with

overperformance demands (e.g., as women increase in rank, overperformance demands might rise because women are more in the minority, their performance is more visible, and they are more likely to be in positions of power).

We included unwanted sexual attention as a control variable. Gender harassment often co-occurs with more serious forms of harassment such as unwanted sexual attention. It was therefore important to investigate the effects of gender harassment over and above unwanted sexual attention. We could not examine the unique effects of unwanted sexual attention as a major variable because, as described in the Method section, there was no individual who reported unwanted sexual attention without also reporting gender harassment. We also controlled for intrinsic job satisfaction (i.e., satisfaction with internal aspects of the work, such as the amount of autonomy and variety). As identified by other researchers investigating sexual harassment (e.g., Schneider et al., 1997), it is important to isolate the effects of harassment from other variables that might be correlated with both harassment and outcomes. Including intrinsic job satisfaction as a control meant that negative reactions due to dissatisfaction with job quality were not mistakenly attributed to gender harassment.

## Method

### *Participants*

Data were collected from a U.K. police organization in which women made up less than 20% of the workforce. The research was commissioned to identify factors inhibiting women's career progression within the organization. All women officers, and a 20% stratified random sample of male police officers, were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire sent through the internal postal system. The male sample was stratified on the basis of rank (above and below sergeant) and department (criminal investigation/specialist departments and other departments) to ensure a reasonable spread across the service. Participants returned the surveys by mailing them directly to the researchers. Confidentiality of responses was assured. The total response rate was 60% ( $N = 582$ ), which was a response rate of 60% for men ( $n = 315$ ) and 59% for women ( $n = 262$ ). There were no significant differences in response rate as a function of rank. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 57 years, and their tenure within the police service ranged from 2 months to 31 years. Most participants were probation constables or constables (77%), and most were married or living with their partner (77%). Over half (54%) had children. Nearly the entire sample (96%) was Caucasian.

There were differences between men and women in terms of these background factors. Men were older than women and had longer tenure. Men were also higher in rank (32% were sergeants or above) than women (11% were sergeant

or above). They were more likely to be married or living with their partner (89% men compared with 61% women) and were more likely to have children (76% men compared with 29% of women). Women were more educated than men: 48% of women had senior high school qualifications or a degree compared with 26% of men. These gender differences on background variables were all statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), and they concurred with data obtained from personnel regarding the whole constabulary as well as with other research conducted within U.K. police constabularies (Brown et al., 1995).

### *Qualitative Data*

To inform the content of the survey, discussion sessions were conducted with two groups of male officers and two groups of female officers. Each group had approximately 20 officers, randomly selected from the workforce, and the discussion session lasted for 2 hr. A researcher of the same gender facilitated group discussions. Groups were asked to describe barriers to women's careers within the organization, changes that had occurred for women police officers over the last 5 years, and actions that could be taken to overcome barriers to women's careers.

The theme of overperformance emerged clearly from the discussions with women officers. Several women described how they felt they were "constantly trying to prove themselves," even to the extent that they worried about applying for specialist roles such as the criminal investigation department because they might "let themselves and other women down." They described the sense of having to "start all over again" to prove their capability every time they went to a new area or worked with new people. As one woman commented, "proving yourself never stops."

Women reported how they felt they had to be much more effective at their job than their male counterparts to gain equal recognition. For example, when women achieved high levels of performance, they often believed it was unrecognized or, if noticed, success was attributed to luck, use of sexuality (e.g., "If you do well in a criminal investigation interview, someone would say, 'Did you flutter your eyebrows?'" or reverse discrimination (e.g., "Men say, 'You only got promoted because you are a woman.'"). Women reported being told "You're a good police woman" but rarely "You're a good police officer." Some women described feeling they should agree to all requests asked of them to avoid being labeled as "one of those women who 'can't do this and can't do that.'" In contrast to their good performance, mistakes were felt by the women to be highly visible and used as evidence that "women could not do the job." This was in spite of perceived higher performance expectations for women in some cases. For example, one officer working in the criminal investigation department described how women can be sent in to interview criminals "as a last resort," which puts them under pressure to succeed where men have not (i.e., "It's down to you").

The data from the discussion groups supported the proposition that pressure for overperformance was a salient feature of women police officers' working lives. A perceived need to prove themselves, to work harder than colleagues, to agree to all work requests, and to avoid making mistakes were strong feelings among many of the women. These themes were incorporated into the development of a

new measure of overperformance demands. The men in the discussion groups did not raise issues surrounding overperformance, although this is not surprising as the men were asked to focus on issues for women police officers rather than on issues for themselves. Many other barriers to women's careers were raised by both groups, such as unfair deployment practices, inflexible work practices, home-work conflict, harassment, tokenism, negative stereotypes about women, and unfair selection and promotion procedures.

## Measures

*Overperformance demands* ( $\alpha = .81$ ). We developed a measure for the study drawing on the qualitative data described earlier. We deliberately designed a measure that could be answered by both men and women. Respondents were asked to think about the way they behaved, or believed they ought to behave, to be accepted or to advance within their workplace. They were then asked to indicate the following: How often "do you feel you have to work twice as hard as your colleagues?" "do you feel you are constantly trying to prove yourself?" "do you worry about making mistakes" and "do you feel obliged to say 'yes' to all work requests?" The response scale was 1 (*never*), 2 (*occasionally*), 3 (*some of the time*), 4 (*most of the time*), and 5 (*all of the time*).

*Gender harassment* ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Gender harassment was assessed using five items derived from a scale designed to assess harassment among police officers (Brown et al., 1995). The items were adapted to make them appropriate for men and women. Officers were asked how often in the last 6 months they had experienced various behaviors from other police officers on a scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*many times*). The behaviors included the following: heard suggestive stories or jokes about your gender, been subjected to practical jokes, been called names with negative connotations, heard comments about the figure or appearance of other officers of your gender, and heard suggestive comments or jokes about your own figure or appearance. All of the items were written in behavioral terms and were applicable to men and women, and the term *harassment* did not appear on the questionnaire to avoid biasing respondents. Consistent with the definition of gender harassment, the items tapped both direct experiences with gender harassment and bystander harassment (Gruber, 1992).

*Unwanted sexual attention*. A dichotomous measure of unwanted sexual attention or coercion was formed using three items from Brown et al.'s (1995) measure of sexual harassment. A score of 1 was allocated if individuals indicated that they had "been stroked/touched or pinched" several or many times during the last 6 months, if they had "been subjected to persistent requests for dates" several or many times during the last 6 months, or if they had "been subject to a serious sexual assault" once or more during the last 6 months. Otherwise a score of 0 was allocated. This method of scoring ensured that only relatively extreme cases of unwanted sexual attention were coded, thereby helping to differentiate this measure from gender harassment. It is important to report that there were no individuals who reported unwanted sexual attention who did not also report gender harassment. This means that it was not possible to examine the unique effects of unwanted sexual

attention compared with gender harassment, and therefore it was appropriate to use unwanted sexual attention as a control variable rather than a substantive variable. Of those who reported gender harassment, 90% did not report unwanted sexual attention or coercion as scored above.

*Nonacceptance of women police* ( $\alpha = .65$ ). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following two statements: "Men police officers find it difficult to accept women officers performing the same duties as they do" and "Men police officers do not feel they can rely on women police officers if they are confronted with a potentially violent situation." The response scale was from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

*Family → work conflict* ( $\alpha = .76$ ). Four items were used to assess this aspect. Two items were derived Frone, Russell, and Barnes (1996). Participants were asked how often the following occurred using a response scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*): "Does your home life interfere with your responsibilities at work, such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, or working overtime?" and "Does your home life keep you from spending the amount of time you would like on job- or career-related activities?" Two further items were as follows: "Do you worry that other people at work think your home life interferes with your job?" rated on the same scale, and "Would your responsibilities at home make you less likely to apply for a promotion or specialist post that you were interested in?" scored on a 4-point scale from 1 (*would not affect decision*) to 4 (*much less likely to apply*).

*Intrinsic job satisfaction* ( $\alpha = .86$ ). We assessed this outcome using items from Warr, Cook, and Wall's (1979) intrinsic job satisfaction scale, as well as an additional item relevant to the context. The items assessed satisfaction with the work itself, including the following: the freedom to choose your own method of working, amount of responsibility, opportunity to use your ability, amount of variety in your job, and the chance to work in the department you want. Items were scored from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*extremely satisfied*).

*Psychological distress* ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Participants completed the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978), a screening instrument used to detect minor psychiatric disorder in the general population. This scale has been shown to have high internal consistency, high test-retest reliability over a period of 6 months, adequate criterion-related validity (e.g., it predicts responses to short-term therapies), and adequate concurrent and predictive validity in clinical and community settings (Goldberg, 1978; Hardy, Shapiro, Haynes, & Rick, 1999). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have recently experienced a particular symptom or item of behavior, such as "Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?" A 4-point response scale was used, with example response anchors of 0 (*not at all*), 1 (*no more than usual*), 2 (*rather more than usual*), and 3 (*much more than usual*).

*Demographic variables*. Participants indicated their gender, age, length of time in the service, rank, highest educational level, and marital status. Rank was coded as follows: 1 (*probation constable*) 2 (*constable*), 3 (*sergeant*), and 4 (*inspector and above*). Education was coded as follows: 1 (*junior high school qualifications*), 2 (*senior high school qualifications*), and 3 (*university undergraduate or postgraduate degree*). Marital status was coded as 1 (*living*

with partner/ married) or 0 (never married, divorced, separated, or widowed).

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among the major variables for women and men separately.

Model Development

We examined the hypothesized relationships among the constructs using a series of structural equation models. This type of analysis has the advantage of correcting for unreliability of measures and also gives information on the unique paths between constructs after controlling for any confounding variables. The models were tested using the LISREL VIII program (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993) with covariances obtained from PRELIS 2. The goal was to develop a path analysis model of the relationships among the constructs for both men and women, which could be used to evaluate the specific hypotheses proposed earlier. We considered gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict as focal predictor variables and the other variables (age, rank, marital status, education level, unwanted sexual attention, and intrinsic job satisfaction) as controls. Multigroup analyses were used to evaluate the statistical significance of sets of paths in the model and to evaluate whether the strength of paths was equivalent for women and men. Scale scores were used as indicators for each construct in the models, with the error variance for most constructs set to one minus the reliability of the scale multiplied by the variance of the scale. This procedure for estimating the error variance was not used for the control measures of age, rank, marital status, and educational level, which were assumed to be measured without error.

We developed a model for men and women separately. We began with a fully saturated model in which all variables, including the control variables, predicted both overperformance demands and psychological distress. However, because this model uses all available degrees of freedom, it results in a perfect fit to the data and cannot provide a comparison point for alternative models. To develop a point of comparison, we fixed the correlation between education and marital status to be zero. We fixed this particular correlation because it was not statistically significant in either the female or the male sample, and because it involved the relationship between two

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations (in Parentheses), and Correlations for Women (n = 262) and Men (n = 315)

	Women	Men	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	31.00 (5.98)	40.04 (7.15)	—	.40***	.08	-.10	.20***	-.13*	-.06	.14*	-.16**	-.14*	-.04
2. Rank	1.99 (0.55)	2.27 (0.61)	.46***	—	.09	-.04	.06	-.12*	-.03	.01	-.04	.02	.00
3. Marital status	0.61 (0.49)	0.89 (0.31)	.03	.19**	—	-.06	.08	-.11*	-.05	.00	.08	-.04	-.05
4. Education level	1.75 (0.69)	1.61 (0.60)	-.20**	-.03	.03	—	-.07	.03	-.05	-.02	.09	.13*	.03
5. Intrinsic job satisfaction	5.12 (0.90)	5.23 (0.99)	.23***	.13*	.05	-.04	—	.03	.04	-.23***	-.24***	-.18**	-.44***
6. Gender harassment	1.93 (1.04)	1.70 (1.02)	-.11	-.04	-.10	-.02	-.07	—	.27***	.07	.05	.12*	-.07
7. Unwanted sexual attention	0.14 (0.35)	0.03 (0.18)	.02	.01	.02	.04	-.07	.41***	—	-.01	.02	.03	-.08
8. Nonacceptance of women police	3.25 (0.89)	2.86 (0.93)	.12*	.00	-.08	.00	-.21***	.15*	.13*	—	.01	.05	.07
9. Family → work conflict	1.73 (0.80)	1.64 (0.63)	.15*	.08	.20**	-.07	.11	.02	.04	.18**	—	.23***	.24***
10. Overperformance demands	2.78 (0.96)	1.97 (0.73)	-.06	.09	-.04	.04	.13*	.26***	.14*	.30***	.20**	—	.30***
11. Psychological distress	0.92 (0.43)	0.84 (0.38)	-.02	-.01	-.06	-.08	-.25***	.13*	.12*	.26***	.29***	.29***	—

Note. Correlations for women are below the diagonal; correlations for men are above the diagonal.

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



background control variables. Once this correlation was fixed, the model (Model 1 in Table 2) provided a comparison point for tests of more constrained models. Table 2 reports the fit indices for the series of constrained models (Model 2 to Model 7) that we then tested.

In the first constrained model (Model 2), overperformance demands fully mediated the links from gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict to psychological distress. In other words, the direct paths from gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict to psychological distress were removed. This constraint resulted in a significant decrease in the fit of the model in relation to the comparison model,  $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 20.52, p < .001$ . Therefore, overperformance demands did not fully mediate all links from these three focal variables to psychological distress. These direct links, therefore, were retained in the final model.

The next model (Model 3) constrained the path between overperformance demands and psychological distress to be zero. This constraint also resulted in a significant decrease in fit,  $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 20.95, p < .001$ , so the path was retained in the final model.

We next tested a series of equality constraints. We first constrained the path between overperformance demands and psychological distress to be equal in both samples, resulting in a model (Model 4) that was not significantly different from the comparison model,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 2.04, p > .05$ . Therefore, the final model estimated an equal path from overperformance demands to psychological distress for both men and women.

We next estimated a model (Model 5) in which the paths from the three focal variables to overperformance demands were equal for men and women. This constraint resulted in a significant decrease in fit, indicating that the paths were not equal in both samples,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 12.70, p < .01$ . Further analysis of these specific paths was conducted because of the role played by gender harassment in mediational hypotheses. These analyses showed that constraining the specific path from gender harassment to overperformance demands resulted in a significant reduction in fit,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.86, p < .05$ , as did constraining the path from nonacceptance of women police to overperformance demands,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 8.75, p < .01$ . Constraining the path from family → work conflict to overperformance demands did not significantly change the model,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.11, p > .05$ . Therefore, the two paths from gender harassment to overperformance demands and from nonacceptance of

Table 2  
Comparisons of Alternative Models for Relationships Among All Measures

Model	Model description	df	$\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
1	Comparison model	2	1.57			1.00	1.00	1.00	<.01
2	Fully mediated model (i.e., Model 1 minus paths from gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict to psychological distress)	8	22.09	6	20.52***	1.00	.97	.98	.08
3	Model 1 minus path from overperformance demands to psychological distress	4	22.52	2	20.95***	.99	.97	.97	.13
4	Model 1 plus equal paths for men and women from overperformance demands to psychological distress	3	3.61	1	2.04	1.00	.99	1.00	.03
5	Model 4 plus equal paths for men and women from gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict to overperformance demands	6	16.31	3	12.70**	1.00	.98	.98	.08
6	Model 4 plus equal paths from family → work conflict to overperformance demands (from Model 5), plus equal paths from gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict to psychological distress	7	7.67	4	4.06	1.00	.99	1.00	.02
7	Model 6 plus equal paths for intercorrelations between gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict	10	13.91	3	6.24	1.00	.98	.99	.04

Note. GFI = goodness-of-fit index; NFI = normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation. \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

women police to overperformance demands were estimated separately for women and for men in the final model, and the path from family → work conflict to overperformance demands was set as equal.

Equality constraints were then imposed for the direct paths between the three focal variables and psychological distress (Model 6). This constraint, plus the equal paths from family → work conflict to overperformance demands, did not significantly reduce the fit of the model,  $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 4.06, p > .05$ . These paths were estimated to be equal for both samples in the final model.

Finally, the intercorrelations among the three focal variables were constrained to be equal in both samples (Model 7). Again, this constraint did not significantly reduce the fit of the model,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 6.24, p > .05$ , and these equal paths were retained in the final model.

The final model (Model 7) therefore had the following paths: from gender harassment to overperformance demands that were different for men and

women; from nonacceptance of women police to overperformance demands that were different for men and women; from family → work conflict to overperformance demands that were equal for men and women; from overperformance demands to psychological distress that were equal for men and women; from family → work conflict to psychological distress that were equal for men and women; and paths for the intercorrelations between the focal predictors that were the equal for men and women. Figure 1 displays the path estimates of this final model, and Table 2 shows the fit indices. Path estimates that were significantly different for men and women are displayed separately in Figure 1. To simplify the figure, we did not depict the links between the control measures and overperformance demands and psychological distress. The values for these paths are shown in Table 3. We next describe the paths from the final model in relation to the core hypotheses for women (Hypotheses 1a to 1c), the additional antecedents (Hypotheses 2a and 2b), and, finally, in

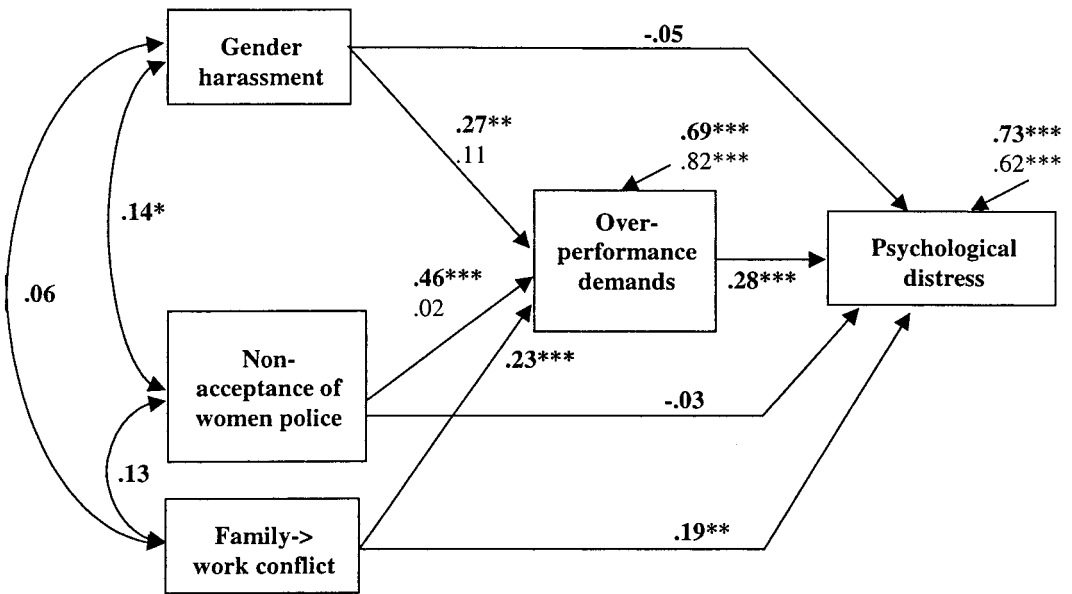


Figure 1. Final model with significant pathways: influence of gender harassment, nonacceptance of women police, and family → work conflict on overperformance demands, as well as influence of overperformance demands and family → work conflict on psychological distress. Bold values are for women, and unbolded values are for men. Values for men are shown only if significantly different from those for women. The effects of age, rank, marital status, intrinsic job satisfaction, and unwanted sexual attention have been controlled for in the model. (Beta parameters for these variables are shown in Table 3.) \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3  
*Standardized Path Estimates From Final Structural Model Showing the Relationship Between Control Variables and Overperformance Demands and Psychological Distress*

Measure	Unwanted sexual attention	Intrinsic job satisfaction	Age	Rank	Marital status	Education level
Overperformance demands						
Women	.01	.05	-.30**	.25**	-.06	.03
Men	.01	-.11	-.09	.10	-.04	.09
Psychological distress						
Women	.08	-.27**	.03	-.03	-.07	-.09
Men	-.09	-.39***	.11*	-.03	-.05	-.05

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

relation to the differences between men and women (Hypotheses 3a to 3f).

### Hypotheses

*Core hypotheses for women.* The path estimates for women show that gender harassment was positively related to overperformance demands ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1a. In turn, overperformance demands were positively related to psychological distress ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for the whole sample, supporting Hypothesis 1b (as well as Hypothesis 3d; see later). Hypothesis 1c, that overperformance demands would mediate the relationship between gender harassment and psychological distress, was supported in that the direct path between gender harassment and psychological distress was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p > .05$ ) with overperformance demands in the model. The model development described above showed that there was a significant decrease in fit when the direct paths from the focal variables to psychological distress were excluded. Only the direct path from family  $\rightarrow$  work conflict to psychological distress was statistically significant. Therefore, the mediational role for overperformance demands between gender harassment and psychological distress was supported.

*Additional antecedents of overperformance anxiety.* As proposed in Hypothesis 2a, nonacceptance of women police was a significant predictor of overperformance demands for women ( $\beta = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Family  $\rightarrow$  work conflict was a significant predictor of overperformance anxiety for men and women ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), consistent with Hypothesis 2b (and Hypothesis 3f; see later). There was also a direct association between family  $\rightarrow$  work conflict and psychological distress ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

*Gender differences.* Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b regarding levels of gender harassment and overperformance demands, respectively, were supported. Women reported significantly higher gender harassment,  $t(574) = 2.65$ ,  $p < .01$ , and overperformance demands than men,  $t(574) = 11.83$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 1 for means). The difference between men and women in their level of overperformance demands is large. For example, nearly half of all the women (48%) reported that they feel they have to work twice as hard as their colleagues do some, most, or all of the time, whereas only 9% of men responded thus.

Hypothesis 3c, that gender harassment would have a stronger association with overperformance demands for women than for men, was supported. Gender harassment was significantly associated with overperformance demands for women but not for men, and these paths were significantly different from each other. Hypothesis 3d, that overperformance demands would have similar associations with psychological distress for men and women, was also supported in that there was no significant difference between the paths for men and women. Hypothesis 3e, that nonacceptance of women police would be a significant predictor of overperformance demands for women and not for men, was supported. Finally, Hypothesis 3f was also supported in that family  $\rightarrow$  work conflict was a significant predictor for both men and women, and there was no significant difference between the paths for the two samples.

*Controls.* As shown in Table 2, rank was significantly positively related to overperformance demands for women ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not for men ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Age was associated with significantly fewer overperformance demands for women ( $\beta = -.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not for men ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p >$

.05). For women, the associations between control variables and overperformance demands were of similar size to the link between gender harassment and overperformance demands but were smaller than the link between nonacceptance of women police and overperformance demands.

Associations between intrinsic job satisfaction and overperformance demands were small for both men and women. However, intrinsic job satisfaction was negatively associated with psychological distress for both men ( $\beta = -.39, p < .001$ ) and women ( $\beta = -.27, p < .01$ ). For women, the strength of this link was similar in size to that between overperformance demands and psychological distress. For men, job satisfaction appears to be a stronger predictor of distress than overperformance demands.

## Discussion

### *Summary and Implications*

This study showed, consistent with other research (e.g., Piotrkowski, 1998), that gender harassment can be psychologically damaging for women. More importantly, this study gave an insight into the processes underpinning the relationship between gender harassment and psychological distress within the context of women working in traditionally male occupations. The findings suggest that one reason gender-harassing behaviors are harmful for such women is because these behaviors lead to women feeling they need to overperform to be accepted and recognized within the organization. High overperformance demands are in turn associated with psychological distress. Support for this mediated model was obtained after controlling for background factors, unwanted sexual attention, and other discriminatory processes.

These findings are important. They help us to understand why exposure to behavior that is sometimes considered harmless and a normal feature of the work environment is ultimately discriminating and damaging. In an occupation in which women's entry is often resisted by members of a powerful and dominant group, gender harassment serves to create and sustain an environment in which women worry that they need to perform to extreme degrees to be accepted and recognized as effective. These findings challenge the idea advanced by commentators that women should be able to handle this type of harassment on a personal level and, therefore, that addressing gender harassment should not be included in policies or legislation (e.g., Roiphe, 1993). Here we

have shown that gender harassment forms part of a broader picture; its consequences extend beyond an individual woman's coping resources and relate to wider discriminatory processes concerning women's performance and capability within the organization. Policies and interventions are needed at the organizational level to reduce discrimination for women.

One appropriate organizational intervention suggested by these findings is to raise awareness of the effects of gender harassment for women, including the processes by which these effects occur. This type of intervention could include raising the awareness of managers, who have influence over behaviors that are accepted and not accepted within the local culture; employees, who engage in gender harassment without understanding the effects it can have on women's work experiences; and victims of gender harassment, who can learn more about their own and others' reactions to discriminating behaviors.

For men, consistent with the study by Barling et al. (1996), the effects of the gender-harassing behaviors were different. These behaviors were not associated with overperformance demands or psychological distress. This result suggests that the same behaviors (e.g., practical jokes, name-calling) can have a different meaning for members of different groups. For women who are minorities in a context in which their presence is not always welcome, the behaviors can be undermining, threatening, and sexualizing. As such, these behaviors are appropriately labeled as harassment. For men, the dominant and more powerful group, exposure to similar behaviors from their male colleagues potentially signals their acceptance within the masculine culture. In this context, these behaviors might not constitute harassment and are unlikely to have negative psychological effects. It is possible that different types of behavior, such as questioning whether the individual is "man enough" to do the task, could be potential candidates of gender harassment for men in this type of context. Studies designed specifically to investigate men's experiences are required to determine whether, and under what circumstances, gender harassment exists for men.

Our research also highlighted other antecedents of overperformance demands. First, for women, a perceived lack of acceptance of women police officers carrying out a full role was a strong determinant. This is not a surprising result and suggests that, like gender harassment, a lack of acceptance of women within the organization can heighten women's perceived need to overperform, which is in turn stressful. A second determinant of overperformance demands demonstrated for both men and women was

family → work conflict. This result contributes to the home–work conflict literature, suggesting that one reason why family responsibilities interfering with work causes distress is because such conflict results in individuals' feeling they need to overperform to gain acceptance. The result is consistent with Frone et al.'s (1992) speculation that high levels of family → work conflict might be threatening to individuals' self-identity because it implies an "inability to effectively manage their family demands" (p. 75). Individuals might then be motivated to protect their desired self-image by trying to overcompensate while at work. This type of process has received little attention in the literature on home–work conflict, and further investigation is required to explore our initial promising findings.

A further interesting result is that, for women, nonacceptance of women police had only a relatively weak, albeit significant, link to gender harassment. One might have expected a stronger link between women's experience of gender harassment and a perceived lack of their acceptance. One explanation of this finding is that gender harassment typically comes from colleagues or supervisors with whom the woman works closely, whereas perceptions of whether men are supportive of an equal role for women police are likely to be derived from thinking about men more broadly, such as male officers the women have worked with in the past and male officers the women know about from talking with colleagues. A further and quite distinct explanation is that women might not perceive the joking, teasing, and other such behaviors as reflecting misogynist or unsupportive attitudes, even though these behaviors ultimately have damaging effects. Consistent with this interpretation, Brown et al. (1995) reported that women police officers did not describe behaviors such as joking and comments as having a negative impact, yet the occurrence of the behaviors was strongly associated with psychological ill health. Thus, a woman exposed to gender harassment might not construct this behavior as reflecting negative attitudes or a lack of support for women, even though these behaviors ultimately serve to escalate overperformance demands and increase distress.

### *Limitations and Further Research*

The present study had several strengths. These include distinguishing gender harassment from other types of harassment as recommended by Fitzgerald et al. (1997) using a measure of harassment that does not suffer from the flaws identified in other studies

(Lengnick-Hall, 1995), investigating the effects of gender harassment on outcomes over and above other discriminatory processes, comparing men and women, and controlling for the effects of potentially confounding variables.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. One is that all of the data are self-report, giving rise to problems associated with common-method variance or the possibility that the results reflect a generalized negative response bias. Although these possibilities cannot be ruled out, they are unlikely. We included intrinsic job satisfaction as a control to address the possibility that people were responding negatively because they were dissatisfied with their work. There were also differential associations between the variables for men and women as hypothesized, and these differences were consistent with other research findings (e.g., Barling et al., 1996). It is also relevant to note that Piotrkowski (1998) found significant relationships between gender harassment and psychological distress after controlling for negative affectivity.

A second limitation concerns the cross-sectional design of the study, which means we cannot be sure of the causal direction of the associations. For example, rather than the directional pathways suggested here, overperformance demands might lead women to perceive higher levels of gender harassment, and psychological ill health might result in greater perceived overperformance demands. Although these explanations are plausible and should be investigated, the direction of our hypothesized links are consistent with findings from a recent longitudinal study that showed harassment results in subsequent negative outcomes such as psychological distress (Glomb et al., 1999).

The links obtained in this study between gender harassment and psychological distress, and the levels of harassment reported, converge with findings from many other studies conducted in different settings. Nevertheless, our hypotheses were designed for, and our study was conducted within, a particular type of organization: one in which women were in the minority and carried out nontraditional roles. It is not known whether the findings can be generalized to contexts in which women carry out traditionally female roles (e.g., nursing) or are in the majority. We believe that one situation in which women will be vulnerable to overperformance demands is when they are in positions of power. Studies describe how women managers (Davidson & Cooper, 1986; Harlan & Weiss, 1982) and women senior executives (Lyness & Thompson, 2000) report they have to outperform male colleagues to prove themselves. Consis-

tent with this possibility, overperformance demands for women escalated as they increased in rank in the present study. More broadly, evidence suggests that discriminating processes, such as differential selection, restricted access to networks, and negative stereotypes about capability, can affect women's progression into powerful organizational roles (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989).

There are many ways to develop this research. One important direction is to elaborate the concept of overperformance demands and investigate the processes underlying this phenomenon. Drawing on relevant theory, we suggested that overperformance demands can arise because individuals perceive their inputs are less valued than those of others, because they devalue or are uncertain about their own inputs (e.g., low self-efficacy), or because they are striving to become members of a high-status social group. We need to know more about these potential links between overperformance demands and such variables as perceived inequity, self-efficacy, and social identity. For example, perceived inequity might well lead an individual to feel he or she needs to overperform, but another consequence is that the individual might reduce his or her inputs or psychologically withdraw. One could investigate the circumstances under which a sense of inequity drives overperformance rather than other responses. We also suggested that gender harassment leads to overperformance demands for women because harassment undermines and devalues women's performance and capability. Whether this specific mechanism explains the link between gender harassment and overperformance demands is assumed rather than known. It is possible, for example, that gender harassment might lead to an actual detriment in performance, which could explain why women feel pressure to overperform. It is also possible that the processes underpinning the link between overperformance demands and gender harassment differ from those that explain why family → work conflict was associated with this stressor.

We have focused here on gender harassment and shown its effects over and above unwanted sexual attention. However, this leads to a question concerning the potential negative effects for overperformance demands of other more personal forms of sexual harassment. Sexual coercion involves demands for sexual favors through the threat of negative consequences or the promise of job-related rewards (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Women who experience sexual coercion might be especially vulnerable to overperformance demands because they

fear not receiving job-related rewards like promotions for not being sexually cooperative.

In conclusion, the present study has illuminated why behaviors such as joking and teasing, often described as "harmless" and "natural," can ultimately be psychologically damaging for women working in a masculinized workplace. Such behaviors lead women to feel pressure to overperform to be accepted or recognized, a demand that is strongly linked to psychological distress. Gender harassment for women is therefore powerful in part because it relates to wider discriminatory processes at work. For men within a masculinized context, these behaviors had little effect on either overperformance demands or psychological distress, confirming the qualitatively different meaning the same behaviors can have for members of the dominant and powerful group.

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