

# Factors that influence whether people define unwelcome sexual joking in the workplace as harassment

July 31 2008

---

A new study in *Law & Social Inquiry* shows that how people define sexual harassment is directly related to the extent to which they view sexual harassment rules as ambiguous and threatening to workplace norms.

Justine E. Tinkler of Louisiana State University used data from a nationwide study of sexual harassment in the United States' federal workplace to investigate how policy knowledge, attitudes about the legal regulation of sexual harassment, and the social locations and experiences of employees affect their likelihood to label uninvited sexual teasing as sexual harassment.

How men and women define sexual harassment is related to the degree to which they view sexual harassment rules as ambiguous and threatening to the workplace.

Women, particularly women supervisors, resist defining sexual joking or remarks as harassment. This may be due to the fact that women recognize that taking less serious forms of unwanted sexual attention too seriously can have negative effects on the way women are perceived.

Men with college or postgraduate degrees were significantly less likely to define sexual jokes or remarks as harassment than were men with a high school degree or less.

Among people whose workplace norms are threatened by anti-harassment enforcement, workplace training magnifies their resistance to defining sexual joking as harassment.

"By locating variation in how people define injurious behavior in both the content of the law, the social status of the groups it aims to protect, and how people think about its regulation, future research may be better equipped to understand why some laws never change the social order while others have an enormous impact," Tinkler concludes.

Source: Wiley

Citation: Factors that influence whether people define unwelcome sexual joking in the workplace as harassment (2008, July 31) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-07-factors-people-unwelcome-sexual-workplace.html>

|  |
|--|
| <p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p> |
|--|