

For female fashion models, job security and sexual harassment are often intertwined

January 12 2024, by Greg Bruno



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Modeling is a dream occupation for many young women, but for those who make modeling a career, finding work can be a traumatic, sexualized nightmare, a Rutgers University-New Brunswick study finds.

To land a modeling job—the first photo shoot, the next gig—models must constantly network, an essential element of entrepreneurial labor. These informal dinners, clubbing events, and private home get-togethers, activities that Rutgers [public policy](#) professor and study author Jocelyn Elise Crowley calls "the party life," are often opportunities for sexual harassment.

"When they are not officially 'on the clock,' models must actively pursue connections that can potentially lead to solid, steady work and often times, this involves socializing, or what I have termed here engaging in the party life," wrote Crowley, whose [study is published](#) in the journal *Women's Studies International Forum*.

"Pressure to engage in the party life is both internally driven from the models themselves and externally driven by the surrounding business players," clients, art directors, and photographers who are many times men.

To assess sexual harassment risks for models while networking, Crowley designed a qualitative content analysis using Instagram data collected by supermodel and activist Cameron Russell.

On Oct. 12, 2017, Russell [published an Instagram post](#) by a young [model](#) who said she was assaulted by a male photographer. Over the next three days, Russell shared stories from an additional 78 people working in the industry. Respondents' occupations included models, photographers, make-up artists, and a showroom assistant. Several individuals offered more than one account for a total of 97 incidents.

Using these data, Crowley searched the narratives for words such as "meals," "lunches," "coffee breaks," "hotels," "celebrations," "dinners," "bars," "alcohol," "drugs," "trips," "restaurants," and "parties." She then produced a sample of party life-related sexual harassment cases.

Using qualitative content analysis, Crowley, a professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, discovered that sexual harassment during informal networking is common. Of the 20 incidents that fit the description, 10 were during job searches, 6 were while working, and 4 were after a job. Male photographers were the most common perpetrators. In each category of harassment, respondents reported personal and career consequences.

While sexual harassment occurs in every industry, it is particularly prevalent in fashion, a sector populated by [young girls](#) taking directions from powerful men, Crowley said. Unlike many sectors, there are very few legal structures to protect models—most of whom are [independent contractors](#)—from the hazards of sexual harassment, she added.

"The most important insight of [this study] is the addition of entrepreneurial labor as one of the chief mechanisms at work in facilitating significant sexual harassment" in the [fashion industry](#), wrote Crowley. "When entrepreneurial labor happens in the form of 'the party life' ...sexually harassing behavior can emerge in an extremely insidious form."

Crowley said her findings could help fuel much-needed changes.

"Any sector that is populated by independent contractors has a risk for [sexual harassment](#)," she said. "That's why it's important to not only recognize the challenge but address it—through policies, laws, and anti-[harassment](#) measures that protect vulnerable industry actors."

More information: Jocelyn Elise Crowley, The life of the party: Entrepreneurial labor, sexual harassment, and the fashion industry, *Women's Studies International Forum* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102825](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102825)

Provided by Rutgers University-New Brunswick

Citation: For female fashion models, job security and sexual harassment are often intertwined (2024, January 12) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-01-female-fashion-job-sexual-intertwined.html>

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.