

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN URBAN CHINA**

William L. Parish  
Aniruddha Das  
Edward O. Laumann  
University of Chicago

Over the last two decades, sexual harassment research has proliferated (e.g., Tangri et al., 1982; Gutek, 1985; Gruber, 1998; LaRocca & Kromrey, 1999; O'Connell & Korabik, 1999; Williams et al., 1999; Wilson, 2000; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Wayne, 2000). Most of this research was conducted in Western settings. Few large-scale, and no nationally representative, studies have examined sexual harassment in non-Western countries, where different cultural assumptions and different sets of social controls might lead to different patterns of harassment. With the exception of one large-scale study of Japanese workers (Haspels et al., 2001), empirical analyses in Asia have been limited either by the size and scope of their sample or the rigor of their methodology -- relying for instance on anecdotal evidence. None have examined China.

Much of the existing research focuses on sexual harassment in workplaces and schools. As some scholars have begun to note (Macmillan et al., 2000), sexual harassment can and does occur outside of the workplace, with equal or more detrimental consequences. Much of the writing focuses on harassment by males with power and authority over the woman. While some scholars note that harassment is often perpetrated by equal or lower status co-workers (Gutek, 1985; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Wayne, 2000) or schoolmates (Cummings & Armenta, 2002; Fineran & Bennett, 1999; Ivy & Hamlet, 1996), few have examined sexual harassment that is perpetrated by lovers, strangers, and others. Moreover, the studies that do engage this last subject, whether directly or indirectly, are often qualitative (Gardner, 1980, 1995, 1997; Duneier, 1999; Duneier & Molotch, 1999; Nielsen, 2004).

Using data from the nationally representative Chinese Health and Family Life Survey, this project endeavors to fill these gaps. In addition to providing baseline data on the prevalence of sexual harassment among Chinese men and women, our analysis distinguishes sexual harassment perpetrated by dates/boyfriends, peers, strangers, and superiors, and examines the correlates of each.

### **Sexual Harassment Core Mechanisms**

Two major strains of interpretation emerge from the literature on sexual harassment – first, the power differentials approach, and second, the routine activities approach, borrowed from criminology.

*Power differentials.* The first approach focuses on *power differentials* in patriarchal societies. Whether stemming from societal norms, organizational and academic hierarchies, or interpersonal characteristics, asymmetries in both formal and informal power increase the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment (Tangri et al., 1982; Berdahl et al., 1996; Choi et al., 1993; Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; O’Connell & Korabik, 2000; Sheets & Braver, 1999; Waldner et al., 1999; Wilson & Thompson, 2001; Pryor & Whalen, 1997; Bernard & Schlaffer, 1989). Three possible sub-hypotheses emerge from the power differentials approach, with the first two being the most common. The first is the *vulnerable victim* hypothesis. In this hypothesis, differential power in the target-perpetrator dyad may increase harassment by defining the target’s vulnerability, whether directly in terms of an organization’s formal hierarchy (Wilson & Thompson, 2001; Tangri et al., 1982), or indirectly through an organization’s culture, or societal norms that dictate power distributions (Choi et al., 1993; O’Connell & Korabik, 2000; Wilson & Thompson, 2001; Tangri et al., 1982). The second, *power-threat*, hypothesis postulates that women who become ‘too assertive,’ and thereby threaten male dominance, are forced back down through harassment. Thus, for instance, women in male-dominated occupations are more likely to be victimized (Gruber, 1997; De Coster et al., 1999; Gutek, 1985; LaFontaine &

Tredeau, 1986; Rubenstein, 1992). A third hypothesis is not part of the standard literature, but seems consistent with the power-threat hypothesis: in *transitional societies*, women who violate traditional norms regarding dress or behavior are disciplined via verbal comments and other mechanisms. In other words, as old patriarchal norms about women's behavior begin to be violated, women who represent this norm-violation are punished through verbal harassment. The street harassment of unescorted middle class women in 19<sup>th</sup> century London illustrates this pattern (Walkowitz, 1998).

Despite the valuable insights it offers, the model seems hard to test or refute, given the potentially competing outcomes in simpler forms of the first two hypotheses – the first implying that harassment is most common among low status women and the second implying, potentially, that high status women face harassment more often. Thus, all empirical outcomes for status and harassment will be consistent with one or the other (or both) of these hypotheses. Empirically, in developed countries such as the U.S., Italy, France, and Canada, it is often the more educated women who report harassment. For instance, in a recent French study, Jaspard et al. (2001) find that harassment is less frequently reported by manual workers and the less educated. For intra-organizational or workplace harassment, Gutek's investigation (Gutek, 1985) notes that perpetrators are more likely to be co-workers than superiors. Several studies also demonstrate that harassers can often be subordinates (Grauerholz, 1989; McKinney, 1994; Rospenda et al., 1998; Welsh, 1999). This pattern could be seen as more consistent with the second, or power-threat, hypothesis – implying that the first, or vulnerable victim, hypothesis, is less important in developed societies. Finally, the few studies that differentiate peer, public, and supervisor harassment suggest that peer and public harassment (including harassment by customers) is more common than harassment of subordinates by superiors in organizational settings (Jaspard et al., 2001; Macmillan, 2000; Lenton et al., 1999; Statistics Canada, 1994). Thus, despite the emphasis placed by much of the extant literature on harassment in the workplace, and the abuse of power by superiors, it seems that the 'vulnerable victim'

hypothesis cannot easily explain most harassment – at least in the developed societies where most studies have been conducted. In order to test these assumptions against our data, however, we posit the following hypotheses:

- 1a. Women in positions of less authority or power, relative to men, will report more harassment.
- 1b. Women who pose a challenge to male predominance will be more likely to report harassment.
- 1c. In transitional societies like China, women who violate traditional norms will face more verbal harassment.

*Routine activities.* Borrowing from models used in the study of crime, a second strain of interpretation focuses on *routine activities*, with an emphasis on risk factors emerging from attributes of the victim, and from the situational context (Cohen et al., 1981; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Clarke & Felson, 1993). Three core mechanisms derive from this approach: *cost* (i.e. the possibility of sanctions), *benefit* (i.e. attractiveness of the target), and *opportunity*. Opportunity is determined by *exposure*, or *contact* between men and women that occurs with differential frequency for women with different sets of “routine activities.” Consistent with this emphasis on exposure and contact, research on workplace harassment suggests that the percentage of men in the workplace, as well as location size, significantly exacerbates workplace harassment (De Coster et al., 1999; Gruber, 1998; Gutek et al., 1990).

The routine activities approach produces several possible patterns that we can test with the Chinese data. We begin with “opportunity”:

- 2a. Because they have more contact with men, working women are more likely to report harassment of all types. Non-working women report less harassment.

Some studies note that women in contact with the public are more likely to report harassment (De Coster et al., 1999; Timmerman & Bajema, 1998). This is particularly true for women in sales and service jobs (Hughes & Tadic, 1998).

2b. Because of contact with clients and customers in addition to work mates, women who are either in sales and service jobs, or are self-employed, will be more likely to report harassment.

In urban China, entertainment or dancing venues, or 'dance halls,' are associated with sexual interaction, even if it is interaction of a playful nature, i.e. without intent to engage in a serious sexual or other relation (Farrer, 2000). Thus, women frequenting dance halls will have greater exposure to a sexually permissive environment, and greater contact with the opposite gender. We therefore hypothesize that:

2c. Women who frequent dance halls will be more likely to report harassment.

In the standard criminology model, the second factor is "benefit", or the "attractiveness of the target." This need not just be physical attractiveness, but could also include dress and demeanor that could intentionally or, perhaps more often, unintentionally signal availability for sexual approaches.

3a. Women who rate themselves as more attractive are more likely to report harassment of all types.

"Signaling," or *presentation of self*, while not explored in the scholarly literature on sexual harassment, might be particularly relevant in China. Chinese society has only recently begun to undergo a sexual revolution, and a new culture of sexuality is emerging (Farrer, 2000) which proffers new images of female beauty sexualizing the female form (Evans, 1997; Hooper, 1998). Women embracing these changes may sport the make-up and bright clothes (Hooper, 1998) seen advertised in glossy magazines even while a minority of women accept pre- and extramarital sex (Farrer, 2000; Sha, Xiong, & Gao, 1994).

According to one Hong Kong-based study, while young women exhibit more liberal attitudes

than men toward behavioral or family norms and socio-political gender status, they report more conservative attitudes toward courtship and sexual intimacy (Choi et al., 1993).

In a time of cultural transition, with new scripts and norms for female-male interaction still under negotiation (Honig & Hershatter, 1988), we speculate that women embracing the new images of sexual beauty might erroneously be seen as signaling greater receptivity to sexual solicitations, particularly from strangers. Misperception theory, for instance, highlights the tendency of men, as opposed to women, to perceive everyday interactions in more sexual terms (Stockdale, 1993; Johnson, Stockdale, & Saal, 1991; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Accordingly, we will examine the following hypotheses:

3b. Women who pursue norms of beauty consistent with the new images will be more likely to report harassment than women who do not pursue such norms.

Finally, dates/boyfriends may see 'progressive women' as inviting requests for additional sexual access, and peers may offensively tease them for defying traditional norms and conventions. Thus:

3c. Individuals with more liberal attitudes towards sex or a heightened sexual interest are more likely to experience harassment, particularly from their dates, boyfriends and peers.

In the criminology approach, the third mechanism is the absence of sanctions or costs attached to harassment. In the existing literature on harassment, these costs are often discussed as a function of normative constraints in society and in organizations (e.g., De Coster et al., 1999; Timmerman & Bajema, 1998). Norms potentially increase the acceptability of harassing behavior in general (Choi et al., 1993, DeJudicibus & McCabe, 2001; O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998; Welsh, 1999; Pryor & Whalen, 1997), and, in particular, subordinate women's work roles to their sex roles in such a way that there is a 'spillover' of sexualized perceptions and expectations from the latter into the former (Welsh, 1999; Gutek,

1985). Norms also provide negative sanctions against women reporting harassment (DeJudicibus & McCabe, 2001; Marin & Guadagno, 1999; Lach & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1993). Harassment, then, is more likely in contexts where sex role stereotypes are strong, and less likely where sanctions are imposed on perpetrators (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000, O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998).

Sex role stereotypes are most prominent in occupations that are dominated by either men or women (Gruber, 1998; Gutek, 1985). Additionally, the exigencies of labor control can also lead to the deliberate designing of spaces of production to focus the male gaze in particular ways – women as sexual objects to be consumed and men as voyeurs (Salzinger, 2000). Finally, workplace sexualization is also increased and may lead to more harassment in less professional occupations, which have fewer normative constraints on lewd comments or other sexual behavior (Welsh, 1999).

Most of this literature suggests very specific variables for analysis that are either not relevant outside of a Western setting or require intensive small-scale studies of organizations and communities. Nevertheless, we are able to generate general predictions applicable to China and to our survey methodology, using male consumption of pornography and prostitution as separate proxies for normative context. Thus, we hypothesize that:

4a. Arguably, frequent consumption of pornography and prostitution in a community both serve as indicators of lax norms about men's treatment of women. If so, increased male porn consumption and prostitution in a community should exacerbate reports of harassment.

It might also be argued that normative regulation is weaker in larger, less cohesive communities. In large communities, anonymity allows men to harass women with greater impunity from social sanctions from friends and acquaintances (see, for instance, Frate et al., 2002). If so, then the following proposition holds:

4b. Compared with those living in small communities, women living in large communities are more likely to report harassment of all types.

At the individual level, single women could be at greater risk: the absence of a husband (who can be expected to retaliate against the offender) lowers the costs attached to harassment. This hypothesis receives additional support from recent work that synthesizes evolutionary and feminist perspectives in explaining violence against women. Smuts (1996), for instance, argues that exclusive mating relationships emerged among primates as dominant males started needing the support of lower-ranked males in intra- or inter-group competition, and therefore began to respect the latter's exclusive rights to their mates. A female who continued to pursue a promiscuous strategy now became increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence, both because she lacked a single mate who would protect her from other males, and because respect for other males' 'property' would not apply to her. This argument also overlaps with the vulnerable victim hypothesis: the lack of a husband or guardian, and the consequent inability to impose sanctions on the offender, enhances the powerlessness of single women, making them especially vulnerable to harassment. As noted above, single women might also mistakenly be perceived as more available for sexual activity, especially in rapidly changing cultures. A given case of harassment might thus reflect one or more of these mechanisms at work. We therefore hypothesize that:

4c. Single women will be more likely to report harassment of all types than women who are married.

Finally, a growing literature suggests that childhood sexual contact is correlated with later sexual coercion (Browning & Laumann, 1997; Paolucci et al., 2001; Follette et al., 1996; Davis & Lay-Yee, 1999). The psychogenic and life-course approaches provide divergent explanations for the phenomenon, the former focusing on risky sexual behavior driven by the victim's attempts to resolve childhood trauma, the latter emphasizing the



incorporation of sexual scripts subsequently strengthened through early sexual activity (Browning & Laumann, 1997). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

5. Individuals who have experienced childhood sexual contact will be more likely to report harassment.

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## **METHODS**

### **Sample Data**

Data are from the 1999-2000 Chinese Health and Family Life Survey. Drawn probabilistically using standard methods for complex samples, the survey is, with the exception of Tibet and Hong Kong, nationally representative of China's adult population aged 20-64 years. In total, 3813 of 5000 selected individuals completed the interview for a response rate of 76%. After adjusting for a change in question skip patterns early in the field work, 3108 responses about sexual harassment are available for analysis. The interview included both beginning face-to-face responses to an interviewer and later computerized portions that allowing private response to sensitive questions. The harassment responses were in the later part of the interview, where most respondents entered answers into a laptop computer on their own. Institutional review boards at [REDACTED] approved the interview methods. Additional details about the study design and the full questionnaire can be found at [REDACTED]

### **Analytic Methods**

Svy methods in the STATA 8.0 statistical package (STATA Corp, 2001) adjust for sample strata, primary sampling units, and population weights. Because we under-sampled

rural residents, logit model results are reported only for the urban female subpopulation under age 45 (n=1118). Very few women over 45 experience harassment. Given this fact, we only examined women below that age. Also, as most of the work from which core mechanisms were derived assumes female targets and male perpetrators, we limit our analysis of perpetrator correlates to cross-sex harassment of women only.

All independent and dependent variables relevant to the core mechanisms described were tested in our preliminary analyses. Several independent variables failed to reveal significant associations and were dropped from the final model. These variables are noted when relevant.

## **Findings/Results**

### **Dependent Variables**

#### *Sexual Harassment and Type of Perpetrator*

Respondents answered two questions about sexual harassment incidents within the previous 12 months. The first question referred to physical touching (*dongshou dongjiao*, or sexual touching/fondling), and included examples of specific behaviors (touching, acting indecently, or taking advantage with a sexual intent), as recommended in the sexual harassment methods literature (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993). The second question referred to verbal harassment or “sexually offensive” statements.<sup>1</sup> We grouped these two sets of responses together as one. Neither the ambiguous Chinese definition of sexual harassment (Tang, 1994) nor the widely used Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) categories (Gelfand et al., 1995), with which our questions overlap on all dimensions, suggest a clear conceptual distinction between verbal and physical harassment. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> The precise wording for the questions was as follows: For physical harassment: “In the past 12 months, did someone sexually harass you (e.g., touch you, act indecently towards you, or take advantage of you with a sexual intent)?” For verbal harassment: “In the past 12 months, has anyone said anything sexually offensive to you?”

the coefficients predicting verbal and physical harassment differ with statistical significance only for youth in our data. Combining the two types of harassment produced more examples of harassment, thereby increasing model reliability. Qualitative analyses in China suggest that fondling, pinching, insulting remarks, and requests for romantic relations are among the most frequent complaints of those reporting sexual harassment (Tang, 1994; Pan, 1994; Bu, 1994). These are the behaviors we have most likely captured.

Questions about the perpetrator's gender and relationship to the target followed the verbal and physical harassment questions. Six relationship categories were offered: 1) supervisor, teacher, senior ("older generation" in direct translation); 2) colleague, schoolmate, acquaintance, neighbor; 3) date or girl/boyfriend (current or former); 4) family member, relative; 5) stranger; and, 6) someone else. Because few respondents reported harassment by a family member (n=13), we grouped these responses together with "someone else" and termed this category "other." We will henceforth refer to the categories as harassment by a supervisor, peer, date/boyfriend, stranger, and other.

Four dependent variables represent the aforementioned categories (constructed to be analogous with a multinomial regression). A "1" value was assigned to any respondent reporting either physical or verbal cross-sex harassment by a specific perpetrator. A "0" value was assigned only to those respondents reporting no harassment of any type.

**Independent Variables:**

- *Not working now.* An indicator of opportunity is for whether the respondent is currently employed. Working women are assumed to have more contact with the opposite gender, and therefore to be more likely to report harassment.
  - *Occupation.* We combine administrative/management and professional/technical occupations into a single "upper white collar" category (9% of the sample). Men are
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disproportionately represented in administrative and management jobs, while professional and technical occupations are among the most mixed (48% male and 52% female; Population Census Office, 2002). Among the latter, however, inter-sex contact at the workplace is minimal. Next, we have "clerical" occupations, which are largely female dominated. Then there are the "sales/service" occupations, which, according to anecdotal information from Chinese students, require a high degree of opposite sex contact, especially with customers. We also have a separate "self-employed/family business" category, also involving considerable contact with customers. Finally, at the bottom of the status hierarchy, is our "manual" occupation reference category. Our occupation indices test both the power-differential and routine activities approaches. Thus, if powerful women pose a 'threat' to male predominance, and are consequently forced back down through harassment, women in upper white collar occupations should be among the most harassed. On the other hand, if 'global' lack of power determines vulnerability, non-working and lower status women (i.e. manual workers) should report the most harassment. As per the routine activities approach, greater contact with the opposite sex should increase the likelihood of harassment. Thus, women in the "self-employed/family business" group, as well as those reporting "sales/service" occupations, should be the most susceptible, followed by "manual," "clerical," and "upper white collar" occupations, respectively

- *Dance Hall Attendance*. An indicator of opportunity. It is a proxy for exposure to a sexually permissive environment, and increased contact with the opposite gender. It denotes attending an entertainment/ dancing venue at least once during the previous year.
  - *Migrant*. An indicator of vulnerability. Migrant women are expected to especially vulnerable, and therefore to report more harassment than non-migrant women.
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### *Benefit*

The first variable in this section indicates physical attractiveness. The next three are our 'presentation of self' variables.

- *Self-rated attractiveness* is coded on a four-point scale ranging from "not very attractive" to "very attractive."
- *Weight loss desired* indicates that respondents desire weight loss either somewhat or very much. Because thinness is a new measure of female sexual beauty in Asia (Nagami, 1997; Wong et al., 2000), this measure serves as a proxy for a woman's pursuit of modern beauty norms, which may also be reflected in her style of dress, make-up, and general appearance.
- *Sexual interest*, a summary index based on the respondent's consumption of pornographic materials and sex drive (frequency of thoughts about sex, masturbation, and consistency of interest in sex over the past 12 months) (alpha= .51).
- *Liberal Sex Values*, a summary index based on reported acceptance of premarital sex, extramarital sex, and sex for pleasure alone (alpha= .56).

### *Cost*

The first two variables in this section are separate indicators of community norms that might facilitate or inhibit harassment. The third indicates community size as a predictor of normative regulation. The fourth indicates the likelihood of sanctions at the individual level.

- *Male porn consumption* indicates average level of male consumption of pornography in the past year, based on self-reports from the approximately 40 men sampled in each community.
- *Male paid sex* indicates average percent of men reporting commercial sex in each community.
- *Population (logged)* indicates community size.

- *Single* indicates women who have never been married.

#### *Repeat victims*

- *Childhood sexual contact* is based on the individual's report of any sexual contact before age 14

#### *Control Variables.*

- *Body Mass Index (BMI, kg/m<sup>2</sup>)*, is based on self-reported height and weight. This measure serves as a control for the variable "need to lose weight." That is, with this variable included, "need to lose weight" is scored high when the individual reports a need to lose weight even though her body mass index indicates she is already thin.

Table I

Table II

### **Overview of Harassment Prevalence**

Among urbanites of all ages, 18.9% of women and 16.5% of men experienced some form of harassment last year. Among both men and women, urban and younger residents reported more harassment (Table I). Ignoring the gender of the perpetrator, the prevalence of harassment is statistically the same for both sexes. However, because the perpetrator was typically a man for both men's and women's harassment, this similarity hides more than it reveals. The simple generalization is that men perpetrate most harassment, regardless of victim.

### **Correlates of Cross-Sex Harassment by Perpetrator Relationship**

Among urban women age 20-45, harassment by a peer (11.4%) is the most common form of cross-sex harassment. Strangers (4.8%), dates/boyfriends (4.2%), and

other perpetrators (4.6%) each produce about half as much harassment as peers. In comparison, supervisors (1.4%) are a minor source of harassment (Table I).

(Table III)

(Table IV)

### *Employment status*

As expected, employed individuals report significantly higher levels of harassment than non-working people (Table III).

### *Occupation*

Harassment varies distinctly by occupation. Compared to work in a manual job, working in sales and service occupations, or being self employed or in a family business, approximately doubles the likelihood of harassment (Table III). Additionally, the consequences of occupation vary somewhat by type of perpetrator. Clerical occupations achieve statistical significance only for supervisor harassment, sales/service occupations for supervisor and stranger harassment, self employed/family business for supervisor, stranger and peer harassment, and manual occupations only for stranger harassment.

### *Dance Hall Attendance*

Dance hall attendance approximately doubles the likelihood of harassment (Table III).

### *Migrant*

Migrant women are more frequently subjected to verbal harassment than non-migrant women (Table IV). In separate analysis, this result remained significant even when population size was controlled for, indicating that it is not an artifact of migrants moving to larger places.

*Benefit*

As we hypothesized, self-rated attractiveness increases harassment, especially by supervisors (Table III). However, the effects for this variable are not as consistent as for our next set, indicating presentation of self. Variables that proxy adherence to new beauty standards and sexual attitudes significantly increase the likelihood of sexual harassment by all perpetrator types. Notably, even among women over thirty years of age, high scores on either the liberal or sex interest scales increased the likelihood of experiencing harassment by as much as 30% or more in supplementary analyses.

*Cost*

We used male porn consumption and male paid sex as separate indicators of community norms, hypothesizing that each would be positively correlated with harassment. Additionally, we speculated that community size would be a predictor of harassment. Our results are mixed for this set of variables (Table IV). While community size does emerge as a predictor of harassment, neither male porn consumption nor male paid sex has a significant effect on harassment. At the individual level, we speculated that single women would be more likely to report harassment. Our findings support this hypothesis.

*Repeat Victims*

We speculated that women exposed to childhood sexual contact would be more likely to report harassment. Our results confirm this hypothesis (Table III).



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Prevalence in Other Societies**

Comparisons across societies are difficult (Haspels et al., 2001; Sbraga & O'Donohue, 2000; Timmerman & Bajema, 1999; Welsh, 1999). Samples, question wording, and cultural definitions and sensibilities all vary across studies (Barak, 1997; Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002). Nevertheless, the 18.9% prevalence for the Chinese urban female sample (most of whom are working women) seems roughly comparable with the results reported by the small number of studies that have used national samples with a few simple questions about sexual harassment. That is, the Chinese prevalence is neither uniquely high nor uniquely low. In Finland, the nationally representative Women's Safety study reported that 19.6% of women experienced a range of harassment behaviors over the last year (Heiskanen & Piispa, 1998). In Italy, 24.4 % of women between the ages of 14 and 59 reported at least one type of sexual harassment in the last three years (Sabbadini, 1998). In the French National Survey on Violence Against Women, which asked about incidents both at work and in public areas occurring in the last year, 8.3% of French women (15% of Paris women) reported some form of harassment (Jaspard et al., 2001).

### **Correlates**

We started with two contrasting conceptual approaches, the power differentials perspective, and the routine activities model from criminology. In this section, we evaluate these approaches based on our results.

We outlined three possible hypotheses that emerge from the power differentials model. We begin with the vulnerable victim hypothesis (i.e. Hypothesis 1a). Thus, differential power in the target-perpetrator dyad may increase harassment, whether directly in terms of an organization's formal hierarchy, or indirectly through an organization's culture, or societal norms that dictate power. At least in gross demographic terms, our

results contradict this hypothesis: it is women near the top of the occupational hierarchy, rather than the ones in manual occupations, who are more likely to be harassed. Also, employed women are more likely to report harassment. However, it might be argued that harassment is enabled not by 'global' power differentials, but by 'local' ones. For instance, among higher status women, clerical workers are more likely to report harassment than women in upper white collar professions. Additionally, migrant women are more frequently subjected to verbal harassment than non-migrant women. Our results therefore highlight the need for further investigation into local power differentials.

Second, we have the power-threat hypothesis, which stipulates that women who threaten male predominance, whether by being 'too assertive' or by violating 'male territory,' are forced back down through harassment (Hypothesis 1b). Our results indicate that in the status hierarchy, it is not women in professional/technical or administration/management positions who report the most harassment, but rather women in sales and service occupations, and the self-employed. The latter tend to be occupations with a high percentage of females. Thus, the most vulnerable women are not those in more atypical occupations nor those in high status occupations who might threaten male status. Thus, within the limitations of these data, the standard version of the power-threat hypothesis is not supported.

The third hypothesis applies to societies in transition. While not in the standard literature, we argue that it is a plausible explanation for harassment, and is consistent with the power-threat hypothesis. Thus, as old patriarchal norms about women's behavior begin to be violated, women who represent this violation are punished via verbal harassment (Hypothesis 1c). For instance, women who go against traditional norms about dress and/or behavior are disciplined via comments. Our results provide somewhat greater support for this hypothesis. Consistent with this conclusion, it is not in the more cosmopolitan coastal regions that women report the most harassment, but rather in the more traditional North and Interior. Additionally, women with more liberal attitudes, higher sex drive, and self--

reported need to lose weight are more likely to say they were harassed. (One concern was that our negative effect for coastal living was due to the controls we had introduced for dance hall attendance, desired weight loss, attitudes toward sex, sex drive, and attractiveness. In separate analysis, however, the effect remained at least mildly negative even when these controls are removed from the equation).

Next, we examine the routine activities model. Of the three mechanisms the model stipulates, the first is opportunity, as determined by exposure and contact in the course of routine or daily activities. Thus, we speculated that working women would be more likely to report harassment of all types (Hypothesis 2a). As we demonstrated above, working women are indeed more likely to report harassment than non-working women. The significance of this variable probably reflects a partially tautological relationship with harassment by a supervisor or by peers. A supervisor or co-worker cannot, obviously, harass one unless one is working. Nevertheless, a working Chinese woman may also be more likely to be harassed simply because she is more likely to ride on crowded buses or elevators, ride her bicycle down the street, or otherwise frequent public spaces. Many of the anecdotes described in Chinese qualitative studies refer to harassment scenarios that occur in public places, such as being fondled on a bus or pinched in a store (Bu, 1994; Tang, 1994). Additionally, a study of sexual harassment in Malaysia specifically notes a high incidence of harassment on buses and on the streets (Haspels et al., 2001).

We also speculated that women who were either self employed or in a family business, or in sales and service occupations, would be the most likely to be harassed (Hypothesis 2b). Our results support this hypothesis. These are occupations where contact with strangers continues throughout the workday. For sales and service occupations, the public exposure afforded may also give dates and boyfriends the opportunity to approach and harass their current or former dates and girlfriends. In contrast, those women employed in manual positions, where public contact is minimal, are protected from these and other harassment forms. Additionally, in China, factory employees, who may label

themselves as manual workers, often live in compounds on or very near the factory premises. This limits travel, and the exposure it implies.

Finally, we speculated that women who frequented dance halls would be more likely to report harassment (Hypothesis 2c). As we demonstrated above, dance hall attendance approximately doubles the likelihood of harassment. When, in separate analysis, we substituted the dance hall variable with a dummy indicating weekly participation in social activities of any type other than family-related, the effect for peer harassment no longer obtained. Thus, the sexualized nature of dance halls appears to contribute to increased peer harassment. Alternatively, given the connotations of sexual promiscuity that may be attached to dance hall attendees, it is possible that attendance increases the odds of harassment in the form of either sexual solicitations or offensive chiding, which may or may not take place in the dance hall itself. Thus, whether harassment is driven by lack of constraints on perpetrators in a sexually permissive environment, or the designation of attendees as “progressive” women, and therefore acceptable targets, is unclear. While the insignificance of our measures of community tolerance suggests the latter, our measures may be too crude to fully capture the role of normative environment.

In the routine activities model, the second factor is “benefit”, or “attractiveness of the target.” To examine the effects of physical attractiveness, we speculated that women who rated themselves as more attractive would be more likely to report harassment of all types (Hypothesis 3a). To examine intentional or unintentional signaling through dress or demeanor, i.e. ‘presentation of self,’ we hypothesized that women who pursued new and sexualized norms of beauty would be more likely to be harassed (Hypothesis 3b), and also that individuals with more liberal attitudes towards sex or a heightened sexual interest would be more likely to experience harassment (Hypothesis 3c). While our results indicate that physically attractive women do indeed face greater harassment, the strongest results in our data represent the area receiving the least attention in the West, namely, presentation of self. As we argue above, this mechanism is particularly applicable to China. Our results

indicate that those we term “progressive” women --as indicated by their acceptance of new norms of beauty, demonstrated sexual interest, and liberal sex values— are the most likely targets of harassment. Regardless of their age and marital status, progressive women are more likely to be harassed.

Two possibilities might explain these findings: 1) More progressive women may be more likely to label sexual solicitations or other behaviors as harassing; And, 2) These women may be targeted as more available for sexual solicitation (to respond positively to sexual approaches). Reporting biases are suggested to be particularly evident among more educated (Lach & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1993) or liberal (defined as sensitive to sexism) women (Vaux, 1993), who may simply be more aware of and therefore more likely to report harassment. While our results may partially reflect heightened sensitivity, we suggest that additional effects may also be represented. Most respondents in a Hong Kong study (Choi et al., 1993) did not believe that sexual harassment “...is a problem invented by women’s liberation activists.” The same study also found no correlation between readiness to identify sexual harassment as a social problem and progressiveness of views on courtship, for which pre-marital sex acceptance, as in our liberal values index, is a primary measure. Notably, reports of harassment also did not increase linearly with education in our data, as we would expect if knowledge of harassment were the root cause leading progressive women to report more harassment.

A second possible explanation suggests that progressive women are viewed as more likely to accept sexual solicitations and are therefore more likely to be targeted. If these women truly are more progressive in their beliefs about sexual encounters and interested in sex, why then do they label solicitations as harassment? We suggest two explanations. First, while these women may be theoretically more progressive in their sexual views and interests, they may not be more progressive in their personal behavior standards. In other words, while they may be willing to accept premarital sex or other interactions in theory, they are not willing to engage in it. Thus, solicitations are perceived as harassing. Yet, it is

notable that even sexually active women, who apparently have loosened their own personal beliefs, continue to report more harassment. Quite possibly, these women have loosened their standards to allow for premarital sex with a fiancé or intended fiancé, but not others.

Alternatively, we propose that some of what is reported by these individuals is not sexual solicitations, but sexual chiding. While harassment of this nature is roughly analogous to what the Western literature terms gender harassment, we suggest that it is driven by deviations not from gender stereotypes, but from traditional beliefs that may or may not be gender specific. In other words, it is not patriarchy as such, but rather the violation of non-gender specific norms that drives harassment. The mechanism therefore overlaps, but is not synonymous, with the third hypothesis under the power-differentials approach, which focuses specifically on the violation of patriarchal norms in transitional societies.

Thus women, and possibly also men, of all ages may be chided by their peers for defying tradition by espousing liberal views, engaging in premarital sex, or otherwise participating in the emerging Chinese sexual culture. This would further explain the particular significance of our presentation-of-self variables. In contrast with uneducated or submissive women, who are protected from harassment, liberal and sexually active women defy convention, and may therefore be targeted for harassment in ways that sanction them for challenging the status quo. Peers and supervisors, those for whom sexual activity of singles has a substantial effect, are also more likely to harass verbally than physically (.92:1 for supervisors and 1.20:1 for peers, versus .65:1 for both dates/boyfriends and strangers). While we initially considered the general character of physical and verbal harassment to be indistinguishable, verbal harassment may include a qualitatively different form of harassment whose intent is social sanctioning. Women may be ridiculed for their offense to traditional prohibitions on premarital sex or other progressive behaviors. Particularly among supervisors, who we might expect to attempt physical contact with their

targets, the prevalence of verbal harassment suggests that the harassing interaction may be different from the prototypical scenario.

In the routine activities model, a third factor is absence of sanctions or costs. We argue that at the community level, costs would vary with social norms and regulations. Norms potentially increase the acceptability of harassing behavior in general and, in particular, define sex roles in such a way that the victims get saddled with the blame. Moreover, norms distinguish sexual harassment targets according to their norm violations and provide negative sanctions against women reporting harassment. Harassment, then, is more likely where sex role stereotypes are strong and less likely if sanctions are imposed on perpetrators.

We argued above that frequent consumption of pornography and commercial sex in a community provide proxies for lax norms about men's treatment of women. Thus, high levels of both were expected to exacerbate reports of harassment (Hypothesis 4a). Arguably, normative regulation is also weaker in larger, less cohesive communities. In large communities, anonymity allows men to harass women with greater impunity from social sanctions from friends and acquaintances. We therefore hypothesized that compared with those living in small communities, women living in large communities would be more likely to report harassment of all types (Hypothesis 4b). Our results indicate that while community size does predict harassment, male commercial sex and porn consumption do not. We speculate that far from leading to harassment, the latter might even provide separate outlets for male sexual drives.

We also hypothesized that single women would be more likely to report harassment of all types than women who were married (Hypothesis 4c). Our results support this hypothesis. We contend that the absence of a husband reduces the likelihood of sanctions against the offender. As we point out above, this argument receives additional support from recent work that synthesizes evolutionary and feminist perspectives in explaining violence against women. This absence-of-guardianship approach also overlaps with the 'vulnerable

victim' perspective: lack of a husband or guardian increases the power-differentials between single women and possible offenders, thereby enhancing the former's vulnerability to harassment. One might therefore argue that in both organizations and communities, it is the powerless female with no means to fight back who is victimized. Additionally, single women might also mistakenly be perceived as signaling availability. Which particular mechanism (or combination of mechanisms) drives harassment in such cases is as yet unclear. Further investigation is required before the causal processes can be precisely delineated.

Finally, we speculated that individuals who had experienced childhood sexual contact would be more likely to report harassment (Hypothesis 5). Our results confirm this hypothesis. Our study thus adds to the growing literature suggesting that childhood sexual contact is correlated with later sexual coercion. Understandably, we do not adjudicate here between psychogenic and life-course approaches, which provide divergent explanations for the phenomenon. Whether the associations we observe derive from the victim's attempts to resolve childhood trauma, or her incorporation of specific sexual scripts that are subsequently reinforced through early sexual activity, is unclear.

Overall, then, the routine activities model from criminology is more consistent with our data than the power-differentials perspective.

### **Research Limitations**

There are many limitations to our analysis. We had only a few questionnaire items available for analysis, and thus we only scratch the surface of the harassment topic. We must rely on self reports that provides little evidence of the exact behaviors being reported. Thus, to some extent, we may be measuring variation in the "measuring instrument" (the respondent doing the reporting), with respondents being differentially offended by the same behaviors. Our cell sizes for some of the analysis are small – e.g., for harassment by supervisor and for childhood sexual contact. This, in turn, makes it difficult to produce



statistically significant results. Because of small sample sizes, in part, we analyzed neither rural patterns nor same-sex harassment among men or women.

### **Contributions to the Sexual Harassment Literature**

The study presented here is the first to use a general population sample to examine all types of harassment in a developing non-Western country. It therefore constitutes a valuable addition to the statistics on the comparative prevalence of sexual harassment. The results indicate that when measured via omnibus surveys for the total population, harassment prevalence in urban China resembles prevalence found in the West.

A primary focus of this study is on public harassment. In contrast to much of scholarly literature, which focuses predominantly on workplace harassment by supervisors, some studies have suggested that public harassment could be a more common form. The results presented above support this latter proposition, indicating that peer and stranger harassment are more common than supervisor harassment.

Our results also suggest that the emphasis placed by the extant theoretical literature on the vulnerability of lower-status females to aggression by powerful males needs to be re-examined. Given that previous empirical studies have also highlighted the harassment of higher-status women by lower-status men, this conclusion should come as no surprise. However, this insight has yet to be adequately incorporated into scholarly conceptions of harassment. Moreover, to the extent that victim-vulnerability does play a role, it seems to be shaped by local (e.g., clerical workers in close contact with supervisors), rather than global (e.g., all women in manual work where they are not in constant contact with men), power differentials. For this reason, as well as others cited above, we argue that the routine activities approach derived from criminology has greater utility in explicating harassment of all types.

Among the risk factors examined, both exposure to potential harassers, and presentation of oneself as a liberal and sexually progressive individual, are variables that are under-emphasized in the Western literature. With reference to the latter, we recognize

that our conclusions might be misread as a 'blame the victim' approach. We are not in any way suggesting that victims of harassment are somehow 'asking for it.' Signaling of availability most likely takes place unintentionally, and the subsequent misreading of cues is heightened by male tendencies toward misperception, which are particularly prevalent in transitional societies.

Our 'presentation of self' argument also constitutes a critical divergence from Western theory, which emphasizes female gender roles, either because they distinguish adherents as vulnerable targets or because they mark deviants as threats to male territory. In contrast, gender role norms in China appear to designate sexual harassment targets along a traditional-progressive, rather than a feminine-masculine, continuum.

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**Table I. Prevalence of Harassment by Demographic Group and Harassment Type**

Target Population and Harassment Type	Ages 20-45			All Ages		
	Sample Size	No. of Cases	Prevalence (CI)	Sample Size	No. of Cases	Prevalence (CI)
Rural						
Male	243	46	18.9 (15.6-22.6)	325	44 <sup>a</sup>	13.5 (11.2-16.2)
Female	261	47	17.9 (6.6-40.2)	309	45 <sup>a</sup>	14.6 (5.1-35.0)
Urban						
Male	889	179	20.2 (17.3-23.4)	1233	203	16.5 (13.9-19.5)
Female	932	222	23.9 (21.0-27.0)	1272	240	18.9 (17.0-21.0)
Same Sex						
Male	889	119	13.4 (11.3-15.8)	1233	136	11.0 (9.1-13.3)
Female	932	55	5.9 (3.3-10.4)	1272	59	4.7 (2.9-7.4)
Cross Sex						
Male	889	72	8.1 (6.8-9.6)	1233	79	6.4 (4.7-8.7)
Female	932	181	19.4 (17.9-21.1)	1272	194	15.3 (13.8-16.9)
Type						
Verbal	925	125	11.8 (10.7-13.0)	1264	144	9.5 (8.4-10.8)
Physical	918	115	12.6 (10.8-14.8)	1255	127	9.5 (8.2-11.0)
Perpetrator:						
Stranger	932	45	4.8 (3.5-6.4)	1272	45	3.5 (2.6-4.7)
Supervisor	932	13	1.4 (0.7-2.4)	1272	14	1.5 (.6-1.8)
Peer	932	106	11.4 (9.4-13.6)	1272	118	9.4 (7.7-11.0)
Boyfriend/Date	932	39	4.2 (3.0-5.7)	1272	38 <sup>a</sup>	3.0 (2.1-4.1)
Other	932	43	4.6 (3.4-6.2)	1272	45	3.5 (2.6-4.7)

Notes: Reporting of multiple harassment incidents by some respondents (either both same sex and cross sex or harassment by more than one perpetrator type), results in values that exceed those for the total sample in some categories. All results are adjusted by sample weights and sample design. Abbreviations: CI, Confidence Interval (95%)

<sup>a</sup>Smaller value than for the 20-45 subpopulation results from weighting.

**Table II. Descriptives for the Urban Female Population, 20-45 Years Old**

<b>Variable</b>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Youthfulness (64-age)/10	3.26	0.77	2	4.5
<i>EXPOSURE / CONTACT:</i>				
<i>Occupation:</i>				
upper white collar	0.07	0.25	0	1
clerical				
sales/service occupation	0.21	0.41	0	1
self-employed/family business				
manual occupation	0.31	0.46	0	1
not working	0.21	0.41	0	1
Dance hall attendance (any last year)	0.24	0.43	0	1
<i>BENEFIT / SIGNALING:</i>				
Self-rated attractiveness	2.43	0.57	1	4
Weight loss desired (0/1)	0.36	0.48	0	1
Liberal sex values	0.31	0.18	0	1
Sexual interest	0.31	0.20	0.00	0.86 <sup>a</sup>
<i>OTHER</i>				
Childhood sexual contact				
Body mass index	21.97	2.97	15.6	31.3
Migrant	0.11	0.31	0	1
Low education (<=primary)	0.08	0.27	0	1

All results are weighted and adjusted for sample design. <sup>a</sup>Variable maximum value is for subpopulation, total population max value=1

**Table III. Heterosexual Harassment of Women Last Year by Perpetrator and Risk Factors -- odds ratios and (t statistics)**

	Perpetrator					Any (6)	Any Verbal (7)	Any Physical (8)
	Super- visor (1)	Strang- er (2)	Peer (3)	Date/ boyfriend (4)	Other (5)			
Youthfulness (64-age)/10	1.17 (0.28)	2.12* (2.76)	1.36 (1.07)	5.51** (3.38)	0.68+ (2.03)	1.71** (3.11)	1.25 (1.39)	1.99* (2.12)
EXPOSURE / CONTACT:								
Occupation: (cf. manual upper white collar	0.00** (32.95)	1.31 (0.38)	2.31 (1.30)	0.00** (52.07)	0.88 (0.15)	1.15 (0.36)	1.17 (0.24)	1.30 (0.67)
clerical	4.76* (2.10)	1.60 (0.63)	1.01 (0.02)	0.36 (1.24)	1.25 (0.48)	0.76 (0.36)	0.58 (0.39)	0.69 (0.99)
sales/service	6.95* (2.32)	5.18** (2.85)	1.72+ (1.78)	2.70+ (1.99)	1.59 (0.86)	2.21** (4.05)	2.36** (3.39)	1.57+ (2.01)
self-employed/family business	14.62** (2.99)	3.70* (2.25)	1.80* (2.35)	1.14 (0.12)	1.92 (1.07)	2.22** (3.32)	1.36 (0.72)	2.48** (3.55)
not working now (retired/fired/never)		0.60 (0.59)	0.11** (3.33)	0.67 (0.71)	0.27+ (1.87)	0.36* (2.51)	0.38 (1.40)	0.22** (3.58)
Dance Hall Attendance (any last year)	2.46+ (1.73)	1.94 (1.61)	2.83** (2.81)	2.14 (0.88)	2.15 (1.04)	2.17** (4.68)	1.54+ (1.82)	2.43** (3.13)
BENEFIT / SIGNALING:								
Self-rated attractiveness	2.70* (2.27)	0.61 (1.14)	1.82 (1.45)	1.23 (0.86)	1.11 (0.24)	1.31 (1.50)	1.42* (2.08)	1.32 (1.45)
Weight loss desired (0/1)	0.27 (1.24)	2.26* (2.51)	1.73* (2.36)	1.30 (0.51)	1.63* (2.05)	1.62** (2.90)	1.47 (1.25)	1.25 (0.96)
Liberal sex values	2.17+ (1.94)	1.90* (2.23)	1.81** (3.87)	6.16** (3.81)	2.27+ (1.82)	2.81** (5.55)	2.19** (7.30)	2.42** (3.50)
Sexual interest	3.52** (3.07)	1.00 (0.02)	2.64** (4.15)	1.54* (2.10)	1.04 (0.11)	1.46+ (1.78)	1.29 (1.15)	1.50 (1.68)
Childhood Sexual Contact						2.58** (3.21)	1.17 (0.22)	3.55** (2.93)
Body Mass Index	1.18 (1.33)	0.95 (0.45)	1.04 (0.83)	1.02 (0.26)	1.09 (1.47)	1.02 (0.83)	1.01 (0.25)	1.08 (1.16)
Observations	607	784	816	762	766	923	923	916

Notes: In columns 1-6, verbal and physical harassment are combined. In columns 1-5, the comparison is between a person harassed by each perpetrator and those reporting no harassment by any perpetrator. Respondents may have multiple types of perpetrators. Sample limited to urban women age 20-45. + p < .10 \* p < .05 \*\* p < .01

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**Table IV. Additional Risk Factors for Heterosexual Sexual Harassment**

	Type of Harassment		
	Verbal	Physical	Any
<u>Individual Traits:</u>			
Migrant	1.95* (2.21)	1.02 (0.06)	1.73 (1.44)
Single (non-married)	1.99+ (1.86)	1.54 (1.03)	2.05+ (1.99)
Education	0.91 (1.26)	1.08 (0.36)	1.02 (0.18)
<u>Community traits:</u>			
Coast	0.64 (1.70)	0.77 (1.19)	0.74* (2.44)
Population (logged)	1.16+ (1.99)	0.98 (0.37)	1.05 (1.00)
Male porn consumption	0.99 (0.78)	1.00 (0.09)	0.99 (0.89)
Male paid sex	0.95* (2.58)	0.99 (0.47)	0.99 (1.09)

Notes: These risk factors are entered one item at a time into model 6 of table 3.

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