

# ‘I Didn’t Recognize It as a Bad Experience until I was Much Older’’: Age, Experience, and Workers’ Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

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Analyzing interview data from 33 women and men, we examine how perceptions of sexual harassment are linked to age, experience, and historical context. Participants described workplace experiences from adolescence into their late twenties. Three themes emerged. First, as adolescents, respondents perceived some of the sexualized interactions they experienced at work as fun. Second, while participants did not define some of their early experiences as sexual harassment at the time, they do so today. Finally, participants suggested that prior work experiences changed their ideas about workplace interactions and themselves as workers. In sum, we find age is a fundamental dimension of power shaping individuals’ perceptions of sexualized interactions at work.

*Sexual harassment is anything that would offend anyone in any way. — Dan*

*Sexual harassment is a culture of disrespectful behavior that’s tolerated. — Hannah*

*Sexual harassment is anything that makes you feel uncomfortable that you’re not okay with and you ask them to not do it and they still do.— April*

*Sexual harassment is comments about someone’s sexuality, sexual preference, or anything demeaning.— Adam*

*Sexual harassment is a situation where managers in a higher position want things from you that they shouldn’t.— Kimberly*

Although lay definitions of sexual harassment vary greatly, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines sexual harassment as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests

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for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature” (U.S. EEOC 2013). Federal and state laws recognize two general types of sexual harassment. *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when submission to sexual demands is used by supervisors as a basis for employment decisions or a condition of employment (Welsh 1999). Hostile work environment harassment occurs when sexual conduct or materials in the workplace unreasonably interfere with workers’ ability to perform their jobs or creates an intimidating or offensive working environment (Blackstone and McLaughlin 2009). The line between these two general types “is not always clear” (U.S. EEOC 1990) but at its core, sexual harassment law is intended to protect employees from unwanted and severe and/or pervasive sexual behaviors in the workplace. While informative, legal definitions tell us little about how people experience and understand sexual harassment in their daily lives. An emerging line of research shows how social position, life course processes, and historical context shape understandings of harassment.

Increasingly, researchers are asking how sexualized workplace interactions become labeled sexual harassment, in what contexts they are labeled, and by whom (Bellas and Gossett 2001; Blakely, Blakely, and Moorman 1995; Giuffre and Williams 1994; Lerum 2004; Lopez, Hodson, and Roscigno 2009; Magley and Shupe 2005; Mueller, DeCoster, and Estes 2001; Quinn 2002; Vaux 1993; Welsh, Carr, MacQuarrie, and Huntley 2006; Williams 1997). We expand upon this line of questioning, asking how understandings of sexual behaviors at work change for workers as they age and gain new life and work experiences. Understanding such change is critical for developing and testing theories of sexual harassment, while also informing harassment policies and employer training and awareness-raising campaigns. Socio-legal scholars, life course researchers, and students of work and occupations also take a keen interest in understanding how harassment perceptions develop and change with age.

In this article we consider how inexperienced workers come to label certain behaviors at work as sexual harassment and how their perceptions change over time. We treat age as a construct linked to work experience, maturity, and exposure to news stories and cultural debates surrounding workplace harassment. Rather than suggesting that young workers have false consciousness about their experiences, we argue that what constitutes sexual harassment for individual workers is shaped by interconnected factors that include age, gender, and cultural, historical, and workplace context.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE U.S. CONTEXT

From its origins, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has included protections against sex discrimination (but see Gold 1981). It was feminist activists of the 1960s and 70s who later advanced the idea that sexual harassment should be considered a form of sex discrimination under Title VII (Brownmiller 1999). These activists, along with prominent feminist lawyers, brought into public view what many knew but did not discuss: that workplaces were fraught with problematic sexualized interactions shaped by a hegemonic gender ideology in which men dominated women (Marshall 2005). Workplace interactions of this sort were labeled sexual harassment. The 1976 case of *Williams v. Saxbe*<sup>1</sup> “provided the first occasion on which a federal judge held that sexual advances coupled with retaliation for their refusal constituted actionable sex discrimination” (MacKinnon 1979: 63). Two books, Farley’s *Sexual Shakedown* (1978) and MacKinnon’s *Sexual*

<sup>1</sup>*Williams v. Saxbe*, 413 F. Supp. 654 (1976).

*Harassment of Working Women* (1979), pushed the issue further into public view and onto the political and legal agenda. In the 1986 case of *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, the U.S. Supreme Court officially recognized hostile work environment as a form of sexual harassment.<sup>2</sup>

While there may be greater workplace equality today than in the 1970s, sexual harassment remains common. As many as 70 percent of women and 1 in 7 men experience sexual harassment at work (e.g., Fitzgerald and Shullman 1993; Fitzgerald et al. 1988; Gruber 1992; Kalof, Eby, Matheson, and Kroska 2001; Thacker 1996; Uggen and Blackstone 2004; USMSPB 1988). These rates are striking, but especially notable in light of the socialization function that employment serves for the youngest workers (Levine and Hoffner 2006; Mortimer 2003; Steinberg, Greenberger, Jacobi, and Garduque 1981). Young people learn workplace norms in their early jobs. If harassment is common in their workplaces, they may come to believe that such behaviors are appropriate or “normal.”

### SEXUALITY, AGE, AND POWER IN THE WORKPLACE

Although few studies have asked how age affects perceptions of sexualized workplace interactions (but see Ford and Donis 1996; Ohse and Stockdale 2008), there is good qualitative evidence that such perceptions vary by gender, race, and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> For example, Giuffre and Williams (1994) found that restaurant workers more often defined sexual advances as sexual harassment when the perpetrator’s race or sexual orientation differed from that of the target. In Quinn’s (2002) study of office workers, men felt free to cast a sexual gaze upon women coworkers as long as they were doing so in the company of other men. When asked to consider their behavior from their targets’ perspectives, men’s perception that their “girl watching” was harmless shifted. Interpretations of workplace sexualized interactions also vary by citizenship status, as white women with full citizenship are more likely than non-citizens and women of color to label their experiences sexual harassment (Welsh et al. 2006). Finally, in some organizational contexts, workers label sexualized interactions as empowering, saying they promote camaraderie among employees (Dellinger and Williams 2002; Lerum 2004; Schultz 1998).

Age represents a less commonly examined dimension of power in the study of perceptions and experiences of harassment. Nevertheless, age appears to operate together with gender to shape experiences across diverse school and work settings (AAUW 2001; Connell 2000; McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2008; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). What we know about young workers and sexual harassment comes primarily from three recent studies using quantitative survey data (Fineran 2002; Sears et al. 2011; Uggen and Blackstone 2004; see also Fineran and Gruber 2009). These investigations concluded that many adolescents experienced some form of harassing behavior at work. Fineran (2002) and Sears, Intrieri, and Papini (2011) found girls who reported experiencing sexually offensive behaviors at work were significantly more upset than boys. Young women were also more likely than young men to label their experiences sexual harassment (Sears et al. 2011). Similarly, we (Uggen and Blackstone 2004) found that both girls and boys experience sexual behaviors at work but the prevailing cultural context leads girls and boys to

<sup>2</sup>*Meritor v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57 (1986).

<sup>3</sup>Those studies of workplace sexual harassment that do analyze the impact of age on experiences or perceptions are limited to adult workers (Ford and Donis 1996; McCabe and Hardman 2005; Padavic and Orcutt 1997) or based on hypothetical scenarios rather than actual experiences (Wayne 2000). Further, such investigations treat age as a quantitative variable rather than a qualitative construct.

understand these experiences differently (see also Jacobs and de Wet 2011). Girls, who are taught from an early age to protect their sexuality, are more likely to label behaviors as harassing than boys, who are less likely to experience sexual violence (USDOJ 2002) and less likely to be socialized to think of themselves as potential victims (see also May's 2001 discussion of gender differences in fear of sexual victimization among adolescents). While we know that rates of sexual harassment among adolescent workers are high, we do not know how harassment is perceived, how it is recalled, or how individuals make sense of their experiences.

Just as age and gender shape our experiences in the workplace, so too do they influence how we interpret those experiences. For example, men are less likely than women to perceive potentially harassing behaviors as sexual harassment (e.g., Padavic and Orcutt 1997; Sears et al. 2011). Workplace context also plays an important role in shaping experiences and perceptions of those experiences (Roscigno, Lopez, and Hodson 2009), particularly in the case of sexual harassment (Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, and Hodson 2008; DeCoster, Estes, and Mueller 1999). In some contexts, workers find sexual behaviors to be acceptable and even pleasurable (Lerum 2004; Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger 1999). For example, Lerum (2004) found that "sexual camaraderie" in the service industry can promote loyalties among coworkers within organizational contexts where there are shared cultural assumptions and egalitarian power relations.

Research on the adolescent workplace suggests that these settings contain more sexualized interactions than those where most workers are adults (e.g., Reiter 1991). Indeed, adolescent workers are most typically found in service-oriented industries such as retail and restaurants (CHSICL 1998; Mortimer 2003), where bullying (Hodson, Roscigno, and Lopez 2006; Williams 2004) and sexual behaviors such as flirting and other sexualized interactions are more common than in other workplaces (Folgero and Fjeldstad 1995; Giuffre and Williams 1994; Hall 1993; LaPointe 1992). Of course, not all of these interactions are unwanted, and adolescents' high rates of job satisfaction (Mortimer 2003) may reflect this. Younger workers may view the workplace as a place to make friends and socialize. Sociability, or interacting with others in a casual way, and having fun at work are therefore potentially important aspects of young workers' jobs. Nevertheless, the fact that sexualized interactions such as flirting, horseplay, and teasing are more likely to occur in service settings, where adolescents typically work, raises questions about the potential vulnerability of young workers. Do adolescents find these behaviors pleasurable, and how might their perceptions change as they age?

The construct of age is important because *how* our perceptions shift over time links to several age-related processes having to do with workplace experience, maturity, and historical context. For example, younger workers may lack the relevant workplace experience to recognize sexualized interactions as harassing in nature, and they may be unable to "see" the power that older workers have over them. They may also be more likely to experience sexualized interactions, particularly with similarly aged coworkers, as pleasurable due to their life course stage, and they may overlook important gendered dimensions of power in interactions with their similarly aged peers. Finally, perceptions are likely to change as young workers age due to changes in the historical salience of sexual harassment. Our study participants came of age in the 1990s, as landmark sexual harassment events such as the Tailhook scandal and the Clarence Thomas hearings garnered great national attention. Those who entered the workforce at that time regularly saw and heard news coverage and cultural debate surrounding sexual harassment and sexuality in the workplace (Robinson and Powell 1996). These events and the media coverage surrounding them are likely to have shaped individuals' perceptions of their own harassment experiences (Wiener, Voss, Winter, and Arnot 2005). To be clear, we do not assert that historical context

is necessarily causally related to harassment narratives, but only that an awareness of such context helps to situate, frame, and understand the narratives that emerge from a given context.

In sum, prior research shows that the meaning of sexualized interactions at work varies with workplace and historical context as well as cultural dimensions of power such as gender and sexuality. Further, while sexual harassment may accurately characterize many sexualized workplace interactions, not all sexualized interactions at work are experienced as problematic. But how do workers make sense of and interpret their experiences when reflecting upon them later in life? We here consider how power dynamics operate when targets and participants of sexualized interactions at work are new or relatively inexperienced workers. We first describe our data and analytic strategy. Then we present findings from our interviews with young workers. We conclude by considering implications and new questions that emerge from this analysis.

## DATA AND METHOD

We analyze data from interviews with 33 Youth Development Study (YDS) participants. The YDS is a prospective longitudinal survey of 1,010 adolescents in Minnesota that began in 1988, when respondents were 14–15 years old and in ninth grade (for more about the YDS, see Mortimer 2003). In the 2000 administration of the survey, when respondents were 26–27 years old, sexual harassment was measured with six indicators, from sexual content in the workplace (such as offensive remarks about the respondent) to physical assault. That year we asked whether survey respondents had experienced each behavior in jobs held during and since high school. We also asked a global question about whether respondents would consider any of their experiences to be sexual harassment.

In 2002, when respondents were 28–29 years old, we invited 98 men and 86 women who had reported experiencing some form of harassing behavior at work on their 2000 survey responses to discuss their experiences in a face-to-face interview. Of those respondents, 28 men and 30 women expressed interest in participating by returning a postcard and providing a telephone number where they could be reached. We attempted to schedule interviews with all who expressed interest. Some did not answer their phones or did not respond to up to three voice messages left regarding scheduling an interview, others later declined to participate, some provided non-working numbers, and others did not show up for scheduled interviews. In total, we completed interviews with 14 men and 19 women,<sup>4</sup> who were each paid \$40. Of our 33 interviewees, 25 identified as white, 3 as Asian, 3 as mixed race, and 1 as Hispanic (race information is missing for one respondent). Participants reported a range of job experiences but all had worked in common entry-level service or retail positions at some point, most typically during adolescence.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>See Table 1 for a summary of interview participants' survey responses.

<sup>5</sup>There were few differences between interviewees and those who were invited but did not participate. Comparing survey responses, men interviewees were statistically less likely than non-interviewees to face offensive joking about themselves during high school and more likely to report invasion of their personal space. There were no statistically significant differences between men participants and non-participants on questions regarding jobs after high school. Additionally, the difference in men's own assessments of whether their experiences qualified as sexual harassment was not statistically significant. During high school, women interview participants were statistically more likely than those who were invited but did not participate to be exposed to offensive materials in the workplace. As adults, women participants were more likely than non-participants to experience physical assault at work. There was no significant difference between women participants and non-participants in their perceptions about whether their experiences were sexual harassment.

Although participants were in their late twenties when interviewed, we asked them about their job experiences during and since high school. Participants' survey responses were not referenced during the interviews but because they had been responding to questions about work experiences on the YDS questionnaires since ninth grade, they were perhaps better able to recall jobs and experiences than might typically be expected. Nevertheless, the potential for recall problems regarding early workplace experiences certainly exists (but see Sears et al. 2011 for discussion about the ease with which memories of early sexual harassment experiences are likely to be retrieved). We attempted to deal with this during the interviews by giving participants the chance to add to or amend their statements at any point during their interview. We also prompted participants to help them recall adolescent jobs by asking for a sequential reporting of jobs held. Reporting their high school jobs, in order of experience, seemed to help jog participants' memories and place them in the frame of mind to recall those experiences.

Given the interview topic, we also recognize that social desirability concerns may have influenced participants' reports of their experiences. We attempted to avoid social desirability biases by framing as many of our questions as possible around "workplace experiences" and "problems in the workplace" rather than "sexual harassment." Respondents were also promised confidentiality of their responses, including the use of pseudonyms in reports and slight alterations to other potentially identifying details.

The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and took place at a location of the participants' choosing, usually in their homes, in our offices, or at a nearby coffee shop or restaurant. Our analytic approach was primarily inductive. Although an interview guide was used (Warren and Karner 2005), participants were asked to describe their experiences in their own words and not provided specific response categories. Participants told us about the experiences they felt were most important to share based on our interest in sexual harassment, problems in the workplace, and workplace sexuality. Each interview, while guided by the interviewer, differed slightly—some participants focused more on describing jobs held during adolescence, others on recent jobs, and still others on their general impressions about sexual harassment and problems in the workplace. We collected data on all of these issues from every participant. Appendix A contains an outline of our interview guide.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed and imported into the computer program NVivo. NVivo assists researchers with organizing, managing, interpreting, and analyzing non-numerical, qualitative data. Once the transcripts, ranging from 20 to 60 pages each, were imported into NVivo, we first coded the data according to the themes outlined in our interview guide. We then closely reviewed each transcript again, looking for common themes across interviews and coding like categories of data together. These passages, referred to as codes or "meaning units" (Weiss 2004), were then labeled and given a name intended to succinctly portray the themes present in the code. For this paper, we coded every quote that had something to do with labeling harassment. After reviewing passages within this code, we placed quotes that seemed related together, creating several sub-codes. These sub-codes were named and are represented by the three subtitles within the findings section of this paper. Once our sub-codes were labeled, we re-examined the interview transcripts, coding additional quotes that fit the theme of each sub-code.

TABLE 1  
Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Race	Behaviors reported on survey: High School	Behaviors reported on survey: Post High School	Any prior experiences defined as sexual harassment?
Jordan	woman	white	jokes	jokes, questions	no
Carrie	woman	white	questions	none	no
Nicole	woman	white	none	jokes, questions	missing
Erin	woman	white	jokes, questions, space, touch, materials, assault	jokes, questions, space, touch	yes
Jenna	woman	Asian	none	jokes, questions, space, touch	yes
Marie	woman	white	jokes, questions, materials	jokes, questions, materials	yes
Janice	woman	white	jokes, space	jokes, questions, space, materials	yes
Bethany	woman	white	jokes, questions, space, touch, materials	jokes, questions, space, touch, materials	yes
Angela	woman	missing	questions	jokes, questions, space	yes
Rachel	woman	mixed	questions, space, touch	jokes, questions, space, touch	yes
Hannah	woman	white	none	space, touch, materials	yes
Megan	woman	white	jokes, assault	jokes, questions, materials, assault	yes
Laurie	woman	white	jokes, questions	questions, space, touch, materials	yes
April	woman	white	jokes, questions, space, assault	jokes, questions, space	yes
Lisa	woman	white	jokes, questions, space	jokes, questions, space	no
Liz	woman	white	none	jokes, questions	no
Kimberly	woman	white	jokes, questions, space	jokes, questions, space	no
Pam	woman	white	jokes, questions, space	jokes, questions, space	yes
Holly	woman	white	jokes, questions, space	jokes, questions, space	no
Dustin	man	white	none	questions, space, assault	yes
Jerry	man	mixed	jokes, questions, space	jokes, questions, space	no
Andrew	man	white	jokes, questions, space, materials	questions, space, materials	no
Rick	man	white	jokes, questions	jokes, questions	no
Joe	man	white	jokes	jokes, questions	no
Cam	man	Asian	none	jokes, space	yes
John	man	Asian	none	jokes, questions, space	no
Adam	man	mixed	none	questions, space	no
Eric	man	white	jokes	jokes, questions, space	no
Brett	man	white	jokes, questions, space	jokes, questions	no
Seth	man	white	questions	questions, space, touch	no
Nate	man	white	none	jokes, questions, space	no
Matthew	man	Hispanic	jokes, questions, space, materials	jokes, questions, materials	no
Dan	man	white	none	jokes, questions, space	no

*Note.* Jokes = Offensive jokes about you; Questions = Questions about your private life; Space = Invasion of your personal space; Touch = Unwanted touching; Materials = Offensive materials; Assault = Physical assault.

Initially we identified four sub-codes but after collapsing two that seemed related, we ended with the three themes presented below.<sup>6</sup> Our approach was similar to a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1967) in that our analysis emerged inductively. To maintain the confidentiality of interviewees, we use pseudonyms and have changed other minor but potentially identifying details (e.g., company names). Table 1 contains a summary of participant information and responses to the harassment questions from the survey. The final column of Table 1 indicates whether participants defined any of their prior experiences as sexual harassment. Responses to this global question were collected via survey in 2000. As indicated in the table, 14 of our 33 interview participants (12 women, 2 men) defined at least some of their prior experiences as sexual harassment in their 2000 survey responses.

## FINDINGS

In considering how or whether participants come to label their experiences as sexual harassment, three themes emerged: (1) For adolescents, the workplace serves important socialization and sociability functions but the salience of these functions dissipates as workers enter adulthood; (2) As adults, participants underwent a process of reflection, redefining some of their past workplace experiences; and, finally, (3) With the passage of time, participants revised their expectations for workplace interactions and for themselves as workers. According to respondents, these shifts in expectations are shaped both by the greater maturity that comes with age and by the contemporary cultural context in which landmark legal cases and media attention have heightened awareness about sexual harassment. Below we outline these themes in more detail and consider how the themes reveal the importance of life course processes in labeling sexual harassment.

### “IT’S DIFFERENT BECAUSE YOU’RE IN HIGH SCHOOL”: SOCIABILITY AND SOCIALIZATION AT WORK

This section examines sociability among and socialization of workers. By sociability we mean casual, informal interactions engaged in for the purpose of establishing warmth, friendliness, or a sense of connection among people. By socialization we mean the processes and experiences by which workers learn about the workplace and how to be workers. For our participants, sociability and socialization were intertwined. Many participants suggested sexualized workplace interactions occur in ways that promote sociability among coworkers and have a different meaning for high school workers than adult workers. These participants identified such interactions as an important aspect of their socialization into adulthood. As Nicole said, “It’s different because you’re in high school.” Sexual joking, flirting, and jostling, all forms of sociability for some workers, were common among adolescent workers. Many respondents described such behaviors as normal adolescent interactions. These “normal” interactions contributed to adolescents’ socialization into their roles as workers.

<sup>6</sup>Originally, our first analytic section was split into two. As our analysis developed, we discovered that sociability and socialization were similar in that participants described both as being “different when you’re in high school.” We therefore collapsed these sub-codes.



Though our sampling strategy was designed to recruit participants who had reported workplace sexual harassment, it is notable that interviewees reported that at least some of the sexualized interactions they experienced at work were not actually such a big deal. Holly, who in the survey reported offensive joking, intrusive questions, and invasion of her personal space at her high school jobs, said that there was lots of “talking about sex, or joking” about it among the teenage employees at the ice cream shop where she worked during high school but that “it was pretty low key.” Holly said they talked about sex at the shop because most of the workers were “at the age where people are starting to become sexually active so that’s a big deal.” Holly thus links sexual talk to the teenage years, when sexual activity was becoming more salient in her work group. Like Holly, others suggested that their status as adolescent workers shaped their workplace interactions. Several participants went on to explain that they actually enjoyed some of the workplace flirting and sexual joking that occurred during adolescence.

For some, those experiences were fun *because* they happened when participants were young. As Cam describes, the flirting between he and co-workers, “at the time was fun” because they were “still young and still in the stage of courting-ship.” Cam says one thing he enjoyed about his job was “you were able to work with people of the opposite sex.” Likewise, in the restaurant where Laurie worked as a waitress during high school,

There was some flirting with busboys or cooks, but it had a much different feel to it [than it would if it happened today]. It was something where both parties were actively pursuing one another, and I think that element, I don’t know if it would be power or appropriateness, it seemed like it was peers, so it had a—it didn’t have a sexual harassment tone, or feel.

Importantly, the interactions described by Cam and Laurie occurred among workers who were of similar age. As Laurie suggests, these interactions *were* different than they might have been had they occurred in an adult work setting or between differently aged workers. Because they occurred among peers, the interactions were not perceived as problematic.

As with Cam, Liz said that working with the “opposite sex” was part of what she enjoyed about being a lifeguard. When asked to describe her job at the pool where she worked, Liz replied:

It was definitely fun, fun, fun, fun. Like more fun than work, which was great. And there was a mix of men and women. . . . There was constant, lots and lots of sexual talk. But everybody enjoyed it and joked about it.

Brett too said there was more sex talk in his adolescent workplaces than in his post-high school jobs. When Brett was asked how his own work behavior differed “then [during adolescence] and now,” he shared the following about his high school car wash job:

When you’re young you talk about sex a lot. Maybe you wouldn’t be able to tell the same type of joke [at work when you’re an adult]. You know, everybody would hoot and holler, and hoo, hoo, hoo, and make comments, verbally, out loud, about customers. You know, just commenting about how they’re dressed, or, did you see the rack on that one?

In addition to attributing such behaviors to youth, Brett explained that the structure of his high school workplace—a loud atmosphere where customers come through quickly and may not hear

all that gets said—was more conducive to “hooting and hollering about customers” than a professional work setting.

Though interviewees attributed some of the sexual interactions that occurred in their high school jobs to age, April was the most candid in explaining the differences between how adolescents interact at work as compared to adults. When we asked April, “Do you think that you personally interact differently with people at work today than you did when you were in high school?” She replied,

My job situation is totally different. Now I am working with highly educated people, so I just don’t act stupid. I mean when you’re in high school you act stupid.

As April notes, her job situation differs now that she is an adult, more mature and working with people who are more educated. Whether participants saw themselves as having been stupid or simply having been at a different stage of life, all of them agreed that interactions at work are different for adolescents than for adults. That April and her colleagues have aged is linked not just to the shift from adolescence to adulthood but also to changes in work settings, behavior, and perceptions of that behavior.

Participants also noted that some behaviors they considered acceptable during adolescence would not be appropriate now that they are adults. For example, interactions that were at one life stage construed as innocent flirting were understood differently if occurring among adults. Nicole told us, “when you’re a youth, in high school or early college, there’s a grayer area there than when you’re older.” When we asked her to explain why she thinks it’s a grayer area, she said

You’re defining who you are. When you’re in high school and college you’re young and dating and you might be more of a flirt. . . . Once you’re older usually your status has changed, and you hope that if you are married that people respect that you have that and respectable people will honor that you made a wedding vow even if they do find you attractive.

When asked about whether the new rules of behavior applied to unmarried adults, Nicole said:

I think they [also] become more conscientious about their behavior as they get older. They hopefully become more mature about what they say and how they act.

The innocent flirting of adolescents sometimes led to more serious romantic involvement, which could explain why participants said they now try to avoid such interactions. Jerry said “there was always a little flirting going on” at the pizza shop where he worked during high school and two of his coworkers eventually married. Although Jerry considered the flirting to be “nothing inappropriate” at the time, our respondents’ remarks about flirting indicate that such interactions are less appropriate in an adult workplace. In Jerry’s case, his now-married coworkers were previously unattached and it seemed appropriate for them to partner together after having met at work.

Though not everyone found lasting partnerships through work, many respondents met romantic mates at their high school workplaces. John “dated *a lot* of people” at the summer camp where he worked as counselor and some of these relationships were long-term. April also “had relationships with coworkers.” At the grocery store where he worked, Eric said “everybody dated each other.” Some participants described more casual sexual relationships than dating. For example, Liz said the environment at her swimming pool job was one where

coworkers regularly engaged in sexual activity together and “everybody screwed around with everybody.” Laurie recalls both casual “flirting” and more serious instances of people “entering dating relationships” at the restaurant where she waitressed during high school.

Even in workplaces where adolescents did not flirt or date, many socialized with their co-workers. More than in adulthood, participants said that as adolescents, work was an important source for meeting friends. For example, Pam said she enjoyed hanging out with her coworkers at the retail store where she worked during high school. When asked how they spent their time together, Pam said, “Drink. A lot. There was a lot of drinking. And we would hang out together. I was friends with [my coworkers] in high school.” Not all of the interview participants drank with coworkers but many described doing “general high school things” including going to movies or the mall. Some would “go shopping;” others said they “went out to eat” or “went camping” with coworkers. Nate said he relied on his workplace for making friends and having a good time:

I actually had fun at [the restaurant], made friends there. We screwed around quite a bit. God we’d have water fights towards closing, just off the wall stuff. Nothing that was real dangerous or could hurt anybody, but if we had a boring night we’d find something to do to make it a little more exciting. Otherwise they were just jobs, something to do . . . but it builds character.

Nate’s point that sometimes-mundane jobs “build character” suggests that adolescent jobs serve an important socialization function.

Reflecting upon their early workplace experiences, many participants later concede their own complicity in creating environments that could be conducive to harassment. They also note lessons learned from their earlier experiences. Though the interactions described in Nate’s quote are unlikely to have been perceived as harassment, his remark about their character-building quality calls attention to the fact that early workplace experiences can inform later perceptions and behaviors.

### Looking Back: “It Was Sexual Harassment; I Just Didn’t Know It at the Time”

In reflecting on past workplace interactions, some respondents said that they have come to redefine some of what they experienced during adolescence as sexual harassment, even though they did not think of it as such at the time. Laurie recounted an incident where a customer made sexually explicit remarks to her while she served him coffee. When asked whether she thought of what happened as sexual harassment at that time, Laurie said:

No. I knew that it felt bad, and he was a miserable jerk, but not to the point that—as you get older, and/or see the climate, you can define sexual harassment. But you cannot [when you’re younger]. I think that has happened in the last 10 to 15 years, just from human research, and shifting culture, that now I can confidently label it that way.

As Laurie indicates, getting older, along with past events and shifts in culture, are linked to changes in perceptions of harassment. It is the complex of these changes that shape Laurie’s current perception. Laurie said it was only “over time” that she began to label this and other experiences from her adolescent jobs as sexual harassment. It is important to note that Laurie’s harasser was an adult man. Their age difference, both in terms of years and differences in life

experience, may well have had something to do with Laurie's later recognition of the incident as sexual harassment. As both an adult and a man, Laurie's harasser held power over her. Here, the intersection of age and gender is important in two respects—in terms of how Laurie's perception of the incident evolved as she matured and how her harasser's status as an adult man outstripped her status as an adolescent. Laurie's case demonstrates that age, gender, and situational, historical, and cultural context all have socially constructed dimensions that are linked to harassment perceptions.

Other participants also said their understandings of certain adolescent experiences have changed. A number of respondents said "in hindsight" they would describe some earlier experiences as sexual harassment, even though that is not how they understood them as teenagers. At the home supply store where she worked during high school, Nicole's coworkers once snuck up from behind her and doused her with so much water that they could see through her t-shirt. Nicole described this incident as "an initiation," given because she was "the only girl" working with "all males" in the outdoor department. Nicole also endured verbal needling from her coworkers. As she said, "I guess some of the guys were kind of upset that I was out there and it was a man's world. One of them said something about 'Now that you have a woman out here she can sweep the warehouse and we'll put curtains up,' and other dumb stuff like that."

Referring to the wet t-shirt incident, Nicole said she was annoyed at the time, and embarrassed about having her breasts exposed, but she did not consider it sexual harassment. Today, however, Nicole says "in hindsight that probably would be sexual harassment in my mind." Nicole's reflections raise questions about the role that employers play in educating young workers about workplace norms. Though she recalls seeing posters at school about sexual harassment, she does not recall posters or training at the store. Her subsequent harassment training at other jobs, including her adult job as a teacher, may have shaped Nicole's current understanding of her past experience.

It is not just Nicole who described redefining past experiences. After asking Janice, "Tell me a little bit about the nanny job and the babysitting . . . how did you like it?," she told us about being subjected to sexual remarks and unwanted touching by the father of children for whom she babysat during high school. She recalled, "Thinking back there was only one really bad experience that I ever had but I didn't recognize it as a bad experience until I was much older." Even Liz, who above describes her lifeguard job as "fun, fun, fun, fun," later wondered about the appropriateness of the catcalls and remarks about her body that she received while at work. We asked her, "Do you remember any specific comments that people made [at the pool], either to each other or about customers?" Liz replied,

There'd be people, you just walk by them and if they're in their lifeguard chair and you're just walking by going to your area or whatever, they'd whistle or they'd go "YOU are so hot." Or just very physical stuff like, I don't know specific quotes but everything was just constantly about how I would look, because you're in your bathing suit. It was always very flattering, though now that I'm looking back, it was completely inappropriate. At the time I thought it was great. Now that I'm saying it out loud, it was completely inappropriate.

For Liz, "saying it out loud" led her to think differently about past experiences.

As researchers, we tried to avoid prompting such redefinition. While we asked participants to discuss workplace experiences, any redefinition came from the interviewees themselves. Rather than leading participants to define past experiences as more serious than they really perceived

them to be, we were careful to allow participants to define their experiences themselves. By verbalizing her experiences, perhaps Liz became more aware of the social context within which they occurred—one in which men’s comments about her body were both flattering but also part of a broader culture in which men sometimes assert dominance over women by freely and openly commenting on their bodies. Whether Liz now viewed her experiences as situated within this cultural context, or simply as “completely inappropriate,” it is clear that reflecting out loud reshaped Liz’s perception.

Other participants similarly described redefining past experiences as they got older. For Bethany, it was only after she graduated from high school that she began to question the sexualized interactions from her high school jobs:

There would be the side, you know everybody makes those side comments. And, you know, saying nasty remarks about your body or the stuff that—sexual harassment—that you never, or I never did do anything about because I didn’t know it was that serious of an issue until I got out of high school.

After sharing that she felt some of her early work experiences had been problematic, and after sexual harassment had come up in the interview, Pam was asked whether she would characterize any of the experiences she had during her high school jobs as sexual harassment. Pam responded quickly: “Definitely. Towards me, now that I look back at it, yes, definitely. But I think, I don’t know how to, [I don’t know what] my mind set back then was.” In her interview, Jenna noted that one of her early work experiences had been her “first discrimination type thing.” She was then asked whether she’d thought of it as discrimination at the time or whether that way of thinking about it came later. Jenna responded:

After growing up and realizing and having more experiences. Definitely. That was my first job, you know. I did not know. You know, I didn’t. I’d never spoken up or anything. So that would have been unheard of.

Whether because they did not realize the seriousness of harassment at the time, their perspective simply differed, or they were less likely to speak up when younger, reflecting on past experiences led these women to redefine their experiences.

Men also changed their perspectives on some of their sexualized workplace interactions as they got older, but they did not necessarily describe them as sexual harassment. Instead, in reflecting on their adolescent work experiences, some men recalled certain interactions as “inappropriate” or, in John’s words, “a little outrageous.” Even more than women, men may be reluctant to label any of their experiences, past or present, as sexual harassment, since defining themselves as “victims” runs counter to the demands of mainstream heteronormative masculinity. Men in the United States mature within a cultural context where their roles as “protectors, providers, and power wielders” are emphasized (Rogers 1998). Further, because the empirical reality is that harassers are far more often men than women, it makes sense that men may be more accustomed to thinking of themselves, or of men more generally, as potential harassers rather than as likely targets of harassment. Perhaps for these reasons, or perhaps because they were simply less likely to have experienced harassment themselves, some of the men we interviewed focused more on how they have come to redefine *their own* adolescent behaviors rather than actions that may have happened to them.

Several men said they have wondered about how they may have offended coworkers in the past. As he reflected on his job at the post office where sexually explicit jokes, remarks, and materials were commonplace, we asked Dan, “If you found yourself in that kind of working environment again, how do you think you would respond?” He said:

Now I think I’m a lot more mature than I was back then so I don’t think a lot of the comments that were said towards me and I would say back to somebody, I wouldn’t make them at this time in my life.

As he reflected on the joking that occurred at his pizza parlor job during his teens, we asked, Jerry, “Was the joking ever directed at a particular person, or was it mostly like, as you said earlier, just telling stories?” Jerry said:

Oh yeah, there was some making fun of some of the people that came in there. Like I said we were all pretty tight, you know. You think back, and you know it might have been wrong, but we were a pretty tight group of friends, and somebody comes in from the outside and if they don’t quite click, then yeah I remember we picked on some people. Sometimes they’d fit in and sometimes they didn’t. It was kind of like initiation I guess.

Adam wondered whether he may have sexually harassed coworkers when he was younger:

I wouldn’t say that I have been sexually harassed but there were times I guess maybe I was guilty of it, like making comments. I was eighteen, nineteen years old, and there’d be comments made.

Though such remarks were more common among our men participants, it was not only men who felt they may have offended coworkers in the past. Lisa said she had to re-think the way she interacts with coworkers. In her words, “I’ve had more experiences. I’ve behaved badly in situations and learned from it and I’ve seen sexual harassment affect people who I really care about.” When asked to explain her remark further, Lisa added, “I have behaved boorishly [at work in the past]. That hurt people. . . . You know, bad behavior is bad behavior. No, it wasn’t harassment but it was rude, it was boorish.”

Whether reflecting on their own behavior or on actions directed at them, it is clear that participants redefined past experiences once they reflected on them. Many participants’ remarks imply that they were unaware of sexual harassment as a serious issue until after high school. Bethany said, “I just didn’t know that it was wrong. I guess they make sure you know now.” What do participants “know now,” and how does that knowledge shape their current workplace interactions? This question is the focus of the final analytic section.

### Looking Ahead: New Images of Self as Worker and of Workplace Interactions

Participants said the passage of time changed their ideas about workplace interactions and about themselves as workers. Their new perceptions of self and workplace are best considered in terms of age, experience, and historical period. Certainly growing older, becoming more mature, and gaining workplace experience changed workers’ perceptions but so too did the historical context within which these workers came of age. Some participants described their changing perceptions in terms of “growing older,” others as the result of “becoming more mature,” and some did so in relation to the increased visibility of sexual harassment in workplace policies, national

politics, and popular culture. Below we describe the reasons participants offered to explain how and why their perceptions changed as they became adults.

When asked whether she now interacts with colleagues differently than when she was a teenager, Carrie said yes, but “the changes have much more to do with my own maturity and knowledge than anything societal.” Today, says Carrie, “I’m very sure of myself and my skills, so when I’m interacting with someone my assumption is that they’ll treat me as an equal and as someone that’s very competent. My assumption is that people will treat me as a competent professional, and that’s how I tend to be treated.” Carrie says her current position as owner of a small research firm had a major impact on how she views her own role in the workplace and her expectations of those with whom she works. When asked to describe the employee policies in her business, Carrie said,

I’ve been thinking a lot about that lately. Not just about employee policies but when I subcontract, laying out in more clear terms what the expectations are for work performance and for interaction with me as the manager. I’d like to change some of my contracting language to talk about how people behave when they’re interacting with a client and when they’re interacting with other people through my firm.

According to Carrie, her interest in establishing guidelines for employee and client interactions is not motivated by any personal experience but instead by the desire to “prevent potential problems.” Of course, that Carrie perceives a need to “prevent potential problems” may be the result of the current historical context. As she noted, there have been “changes in the workplace over time” but there has not been a concurrent “changing of attitudes over time.” As the composition of workplaces changed, with more women entering the paid labor force, Carrie said “there’s some confusion about kind of what’s appropriate in the workplace” and “people aren’t sure what is comfortable for others and what isn’t.” Thus Carrie has decided to establish some “ground rules” at her business to bring greater clarity to issues she views as still fuzzy in most workplaces.

It was not just business owners who found themselves thinking beyond their personal experiences as they aged. Angela, who at the time of our interview was on maternity leave from her computing job in a health clinic, says she now thinks not just about how harassment affects her, but also about its more general effects:

I think my exposure to the work environment has broadened my horizons of what harassment can be or is, and in how it can impact me. I think now I have that broader view of the world, so I know that I need to stand up because it’s not just impacting me; it’s also impacting my coworkers and my employer.

Angela also notes how her experiences have changed:

What I’ve noticed quite honestly is that as my responsibilities and pay increase, therefore moving into a more professional environment or what I would consider a professional stable environment, the amount of discrimination and harassment or discomfort has really gone down. So the further up in the economic chain I get, the better off I’ve been.

As with other participants, Angela notes that as she got older and gained more work experience, her perceptions of harassment changed. She also matured over time, developing a feeling

of responsibility toward her fellow workers and employer. While Angela's perceptions and maturity may have changed, it is worth noting that moving "up in the economic chain" does not necessarily exempt one from harassment. Harassment does not end when workers enter white collar professions (see, e.g., Gardner 2009; McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012; Pierce 1996; Vukovich 1996). At the same time, Angela's remarks echo findings from prior research that economically vulnerable individuals are more likely to become targets of harassment (McLaughlin et al. 2008; Uggen and Blackstone 2004), and they highlight that younger, less experienced workers may be more vulnerable.

Like Angela, Megan said she now thinks about the impact of sexual harassment not just on herself, but also on others. When asked why that is the case, she explained:

I think the biggest reason is that I'm aware of what it all consists of—that it's not just somebody grabbing me and saying 'hey baby let's go home' but it's so much more. And I think differently now because I am an adult and I am a parent and I don't want my children to be in a situation like that. So I'm a lot more strict now than I was even a couple years ago on it. It still doesn't really offend me but I just don't think it's appropriate in the workplace anymore.

Megan says she "never realized all of these things that they consider sexual harassment because it never had affected me or offended me or anything like that." Now that she is an adult and a parent, Megan's ideas about sexual harassment, workplace interactions, and her own role have changed.

In addition to reflecting on how their perceptions of harassment have changed, participants also described shifting feelings about coworkers. When asked whether there was anything she felt we should know based on our interest in workplace harassment, Marie said:

When I think back it's hard because sometimes I think, 'why would you want to date anybody at work?' But I mean those are the people that you're with all the time, so those are the people you're going to get to know. I mean in hindsight, I kind of wish I didn't date anybody I worked with. It just seems to cause hassles.

Marie also noted that she interacts differently with coworkers today than when she was in high school.

Holly said work experience, and exposure to sexual harassment policies as she held different jobs, changed her views on sexual harassment:

I think the more you work you become more educated about it. And I think a lot of it depends on where you work. If you're always working for a small company, it's never really discussed. And if you're coming out of high school and you're going from where people joke around about it, because a lot of them are your friends, into something that's verbally you're joking back and forth, people don't consider that until you're working for a company that has strict policies and procedures in play and training.

Like Holly, Pam said her views of sexual harassment have changed since her high school job as a waitress. Pam said, "This was sort of before sexual harassment really came into the limelight so a lot of those things that happened were just considered acceptable." Holly's and Pam's experiences may reflect, in part, the period during which their generation held high school jobs. Indeed, it is conceivable that public consciousness about sexual harassment may have heightened since our respondents were high school students, as a result of such high-profile events as the 1991 televised hearings of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas.



Other participants also noted how public consciousness about sexual harassment has increased, suggesting that their own consciousness may have shifted as a result. Matthew said he and others may be more aware of sexual harassment today than when he was in high school because of,

... some high profile events over the last 15–20 years among our politicians that brought to light some of these things. Some are directly sexual harassment, and others are just affairs or something like that and that has brought up issues like this. So I think people are more aware of it than 12–15 years ago.

Jerry also believes he and others are more aware of sexual harassment today than they were when he was in high school:

It's such a big thing. People are winning these big lawsuits. We go through training every year because the state lost a big lawsuit. [Goes on to reference a case in which his employer, a state institution, was sued after a woman colleague was sexually harassed.] It's brought to our attention more now because of that fact, because of the money factor I believe.

As Jerry's remarks suggest, public consciousness may also have been raised during this period as the Civil Rights Act of 1991 included amendments to Title VII that allowed for compensatory damages in cases of sex discrimination (U.S. EEOC 1991). It is possible that the subsequent increase in sex discrimination cases (see U.S. Courts 2011) led to greater cultural awareness about sexual harassment.

Whether it is due to lawsuits, political scandals, or better workplace training, most respondents agreed that their own and the public consciousness about sexual harassment has risen. Respondents' descriptions of their changing perceptions resemble what demographers refer to as "cohort effects" (Ryder 1965). As a cohort of workers who entered the workforce at the same time, the historical events occurring during this time likely shaped their perceptions of workplace interactions, and contributed to changing their teenage understanding of the workplace as a source of fun and sociability. In addition, it may be that the heightened visibility of harassment had a "period effect" (Ryder 1965); affecting all workers equally, regardless of cohort or age.

From this perspective, one might say that we observe "age effects" due to individual maturation, and period and cohort effects due to the shifting sociocultural environment. Indeed, all three effects may shape perceptions of sexual harassment (Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Of course, our treatment of age in this qualitative paper is as a construct rather than a variable. As participants' own remarks demonstrate, the combined effects of the passage of time, increased maturity, and greater experience led many to change how they labeled their workplace experiences. Of course, we recognize that the historical context within which these workers came of age has changed. Nevertheless, were we to repeat this study with today's cohort of adolescent workers, our analysis would lead us to predict similar shifts in perceptions of workplace experiences as the cohort matures and gains experience.

## CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONCLUSIONS

We have considered how age matters for individuals' perceptions of sexualized workplace interactions. We found that interviewees viewed some interactions as acceptable for adolescents

but that the same interactions were considered inappropriate for adults. As adolescents, participants found sociability to be an important aspect of the work experience. Flirting and other sexually charged behaviors were described as “normal” interactions for workers at the adolescent stage of the life course. Once participants reached adulthood, however, they reconceptualized or recast some (but not all) of their early workplace experiences as sexual harassment. Thus, some behaviors were labeled differently depending upon the life course stage of those involved, while other behaviors, even if once deemed acceptable, were later labeled “always inappropriate.” Finally, respondents considered the impact of the passage of time on their changing consciousness about workplace interactions. While some attributed their change in perceptions to role or status changes—such as growing older and marriage or parenthood—others noted the importance of historical context and mentioned landmark sexual harassment cases that altered workplace policies and garnered national attention.

Understanding which kinds of behaviors get redefined as harassment, which do not, and why is complex. We have asserted that time, age, maturity, experience, and cultural context all play a role. Yet participants’ responses point to several specific criteria that matter for their redefinitions. For young workers, interactions that promoted sociability were important to their socialization into adult work roles. These kinds of interactions were generally not later defined as harassment though their inappropriateness for adult workplaces was noted. In other words, when the functions of sociability and socialization were part of early workplace experiences, interactions that might at first glance appear to be harassment were not generally defined as such either at the time or later.

Two kinds of interactions did lead participants to redefine their experiences as harassment. First, when questionable exchanges occurred between young employees and older coworkers or employers, respondents seemed more likely to re-conceptualize prior experiences as harassment. This was true in the case of Laurie’s experience with the older customer who made sexually explicit remarks about her while she worked as a waitress during high school and for Nicole who experienced unwanted touching at the hands of the father of the children she babysat. Interview participants also later redefined experiences as harassment when the interaction in question occurred between multiple harassers and a single target. The many-on-one criterion was also used by men who redefined themselves as possible harassers in later life. This was the case for Jerry who referred to the “tight group of friends” with whom he would occasionally subject outsiders to “initiation” by “picking on” them while working high school jobs. Thus, while we admittedly deal with many moving pieces in this paper, participants’ retelling of their experiences point to specific criteria that mattered for their own redefinitions.

Our findings suggest that the changing social, legal, and institutional landscape led individuals to become more aware of harassment and to label some of their past experiences as harassment. The impact of sexual harassment training, particularly on younger workers, is therefore worthy of further investigation. Initial investigations of our data suggest that many adolescents considered whatever harassment training they did receive to be “a joke” (McLaughlin, Blackstone, and Uggen 2007). Nevertheless, research on adult workers suggests that sexual harassment policies in the workplace do affect workers’ attitudes and perceptions (Antecol and Cobb-Clark 2003). Perhaps sexual harassment training and policies would be most effective if it were better tailored to workers at particular life stages. Such training could account for the finding that, for adolescents in particular, the workplace serves important sociability and

socialization functions. Sexual harassment training that foregrounds the importance of these aspects of adolescents' jobs might be more useful to adolescents than more traditional training programs. Of course, further research is needed before definitive policy recommendations can be made. While workers' narratives suggest that personal characteristics such as maturity and experience shape their perceptions of sexual harassment, more research is needed to determine whether and how such characteristics work in conjunction with structural factors such as differences in jobs, employer size, or other organizational characteristics.

Importantly, even though many women and men described similar experiences, their descriptions were imbued with meanings linked not just to age, but also to gender. All adolescents may be vulnerable to workplace harassment because of their age (Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Yet some of the adolescent girls in our sample seemed to know they were at particular risk (see May 2001). In describing the sexual jokes that boys made about her and other young women at the fast food restaurant where she worked during high school, Bethany said, "I guess it was different than being a boy. I mean, you were treated about the same except for the joking and stuff." Angela, too, says gender played a role in shaping her adolescent workplace experience as a waitress, a work setting where gender is especially salient (Hall 1993):

I think the biggest thing when I think back is it was really a work experience that I traded on my gender with. I was a different person and I allowed myself to—I don't want to say be exploited, but I think that's part of that position is changing your behavior to manipulate a situation, i.e., get the tip.

Later, Angela said her early workplace experience "was really a watershed where I really understood that being a woman in a workplace is really significantly different sometimes than being a man." Such statements speak to the need for future research considering how gender intersects with additional dimensions of power such as age, race, and social class. Also, more work is needed to understand how the particularities of historical context shape perceptions of and responses to sexual harassment.

We have described how age, as one dimension of power, shapes experiences and perceptions of sexualized interactions at work. Our findings, together with prior research showing high rates of sexualized interactions in the adolescent workplace (Reiter 1991), suggest that those whose power is limited by their young age may benefit from special training or expanded protections regarding sexual harassment. At the same time, as previous studies show (Levine and Hoffner 2006; Mortimer 2003; Steinberg et al. 1981), work socializes adolescents to the norms and expectations of the workplace and adulthood more generally. While young workers may indeed be particularly vulnerable, we can take some reassurance in the fact that their experiences are not always understood as problematic at the time, or in retrospect.

In sum, our qualitative approach yields a nuanced understanding of how workers' socialization operates and how people decide whether something was harassing or not. Of course, the time lag between our interviews and respondents' adolescent workplace experiences creates some potential analytical problems. As noted in our methodology section, we believe that being surveyed annually about workplace experiences since ninth grade aided our participants in accurately recalling their early workplace experiences (see also Sears et al. 2011: 502–503). At the same time, our approach allows adults to reflect upon and make sense of years of work experiences. Nonetheless, because we ask questions retrospectively (rather than prospectively)

about the adolescent workplace, our respondents' answers and our findings may be subject to recall bias. Despite potential social desirability and recall biases, our interview approach offers a detailed understanding of respondents' relative judgments about sexualized interactions at work on different jobs they have held at different points in their lives.

Finally, our findings suggest that maturity, experience, and changing historical and workplace contexts influence individuals' perceptions of harassment as they age. We therefore suggest that future research attempt to quantitatively assess how age, period, and cohort affect perceptions of sexualized interactions at work, and how these perceptions impact life course trajectories and future harassment. At minimum, our qualitative findings clearly show how workers' consciousness about harassment develops over time. As our participants themselves revealed, both "high profile events over the last 15–20 years" and becoming "more conscientious" and "more mature about what they say and how they act" shaped their evolving understanding of sexual harassment.

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## APPENDIX A INTERVIEW OUTLINE

1. Work History: Before and Since High School
  - a. Jobs held
  - b. Gender (coworkers and managers)
  - c. Interactions/environment
  - d. Interactions outside of work
2. Problems in the Workplace
  - a. Describe problems experienced
  - b. Any problems you define as sexual harassment
  - c. Define sexual harassment
  - d. Examples of behaviors that qualify
  - e. Describe harassment training

3. Feelings Today
  - a. How do you feel about past experiences?
  - b. If happened again, how would you respond?
4. Sexual Harassment Generally
  - a. Why does it occur?
  - b. Why some are targeted, others are not
  - c. Why some tell, others do not
5. Other Forms of Harassment/Discrimination
  - a. Housing, education, other work problems
  - b. Additional information about workplace interactions