

Young Adults' Intrapersonal Construct Of Sexual Harassment

Irene Abigail S. Guerrero, DComm

abigail.guerrero@unp.edu.ph

University of Northern Philippines

Abstract

There is little literature discussing the construction of meaning at an individual level about sexual harassment. This study presented the level of perception of males and females on sexually harassing content and discussed how males and females construe sexual harassment. Using integrated mixed methods and employing quota sampling, 400 respondents from the Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur provinces participated in the survey, and 10 participants were interviewed. Based on the study results, females and males have varying levels of perception of verbal, visual, physical, and digital body language constructs relating to sexually harassing content. Their levels of perception of sexually harassing content are more pronounced in same-sex communication; female-to-female, and male-to-male communication events. Further, the construct of sexual harassment was influenced by the sender's and recipient's gender and sex, degree of intimacy in relationships, and non-verbal communication. Future studies could explore policy sciences, computer-mediated communication, and misinterpretation and miscommunication in within sexual harassment issues.

Keywords: Communication, Social Science, Gender, Sexual harassment, Academe.

1. Introduction

There is little literature discussing the construction of meaning at an individual level about sexual harassment. Since issues of sexual harassment continue to persist, a formal inquiry should be established to explain how people create the concept of what constitutes sexual harassment in metacommunication. Further, while sexual harassment has been recognized as a major problem that is hidden in most organizations (Oni, 2019), prevalent researches discussing sexual harassment understate the complexities involved in defining certain behaviors and practices like sexual harassment. To bridge this gap, there is an urgency in establishing societal consciousness and a high degree of recognition of unwanted or

unwelcome actions, utterances, and behaviors that indicate sexual harassment in any way. Moreover, there is a need to explain and discuss how sexual harassment is first conveyed in the communication process and sent as a message. As institutions move for gender awareness and sensitivity, issues of sexual harassment continue to prevail. For these reasons, Alvinzi (2018) proposes future research. To develop fruitful preventive efforts regarding sexual harassment, future scholars need to keep researching sexually coercive and sexually harassing behaviors from individual and systemic perspectives and how individual and systemic factors interact with one another. Moreover, Alvinzi also forwards that scholars should continue developing our understanding of what kinds of personality-related factors are associated with different types of sexual harassment and sexual assault perpetration acts and what kinds of measures might be efficient in preventing the development of such kinds of conduct.

It can be forwarded that sexual harassment may be communicated through verbal, visual, and physical assertions and digital body language. First, verbal manifestation is harassment that makes employees feel less comfortable, humiliated, threatened, and intimidated (EasyLlama, 2021). The most common forms of verbal harassment include making inappropriate jokes, remarks, teasing, or asking sexually related questions, unwelcome sexual advances, sexual favors, inquiring about a person's sexual preference or history, gossiping about someone, and spreading lies about them (Ibid.). Next, visual harassment is a situation where the individual exposes him or herself to another person without the latter's consent, and the act affects the latter's performance or attitude (Ibid.). Examples of visual harassment include exposing private parts, unwelcome gestures to another person, staring at someone else's body offensively, and making the person feel uncomfortable. The third form of sexual harassment is physical harassment. It is an act where a person inappropriately touches another person against his or her will, and these behaviors intimidate, embarrass, threaten, and make the victim uncomfortable (Ibid.). The most common forms of physical harassment include sexual assault or abuse, inappropriately touching or grabbing someone, and deliberately brushing or rubbing one's body against someone (Ibid.).

Moreover, sexual harassment occurs in various settings and uses different means, such as the Internet (Latcheva, 2017). Digital body language is how we communicate -- whether on the phone, via a messaging app like Slack, video chat, or email (Hyder, 2020). Digital body language is all of the online activity or behavior that people

perceive and observe from others as they navigate websites, content, and resources (Clyde, 2020). Components of digital body language include how people use emojis, gifs, and stickers when communicating online, how one sounds on the online platform, and how one interacts and behaves him/herself or online. At the same time, examples of sexual harassment online include sexist jokes, sexist insults, unwanted sexual advances, rape jokes, and comments about female players' appearances (Fox & Tang, 2013).

Today our world is more complicated, and it is difficult to understand what people think and perceive (QuestionPro, 2020). As people become more aware of how sexual harassment is created through the messages people send and receive, our institutions and agencies may develop specific mitigating policies and create awareness within communities. The impact of sexual harassment goes beyond the physical experience. However, it is more significant as it is considered a stressor detrimental to mental and physical health (Fitzgerald, Hulin, and Drasgow, 1994 as cited in Houle et al., 2011). Harassment is associated with an increased risk of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and diminished self-esteem, self-confidence, and psychological well-being (Pryor and Fitzgerald 2003; Welsh 1999; Willness, Steel, and Lee 2007 cited in Houle et al., 2011). It is thus timely that this study is conducted to mitigate and answer the trends of our times as our communications have significantly evolved.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to present the level of perception of males and females on sexually harassing content, specifically, it shall:

1. present the level of perception of males and females on sexually harassing content, based on sex; and
2. Discuss how males and females construe sexual harassment.

Literature Review

The phenomenological tradition of communication lets researchers view communication as the experience of self and others through dialogue. Although phenomenology is a very complex term to define, in reality, it is about analyzing everyday life from the viewpoint of its participant (Apuke, 2018). This tradition focuses on the intentional analysis of everyday life from the standpoint of the person living it (Griffin, 2013). The phenomenological tradition emphasizes people's perception and interpretation of their own experience (Ibid.). Therefore, the phenomenological tradition emphasizes interpreting one's own subjective experiences (Apuke, 2018). Under the

phenomenological tradition of communication, this study shall use genderlect and symbolic interactionism theories as theoretical frameworks.

Using a gender lens in the study, specifically genderlect theory suggests that male and female discourse styles are best viewed as two distinct cultural dialects (Griffin, 2013). The author of this theory, Deborah Tannen, is a linguistics professor at Georgetown University. Her research specialty is conversational style—not what people say but how they say it (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2019). The theory forwards that male and female conversational styles are equally valid, but it seems at times that men and women are speaking different languages—or at least different genderlects (Ibid.). Although the word genderlect is not original with Tannen, the term nicely captures the belief that masculine and feminine styles of discourse are best viewed as two distinct cultural dialects rather than as inferior or superior ways of speaking (Ibid.). Genderlect operates on the premise that men and women communicate differently. Their different communication styles are carried out through reports and rapport talks (Griffin, 2013). These can be seen and observed through differences in how men and women communicate in private and public speaking, telling a story, listening, asking questions, and managing conflict.

In studying how men and women construct their views about and towards sexual harassment, this must be studied alongside how they assimilate these percepts with their communication styles. Men and women operate in distinctive communication styles, which may be explored at an intrapersonal level. These held lenses can create a mental disposition as to how a person's verbal language, gestures, actions, and online behavior are being translated to sexually harassing message content. Limited to this study, genderlect theory shall be used as a supporting variable in emphasizing the differences in how men and women create meaning of sexual harassment.

The second framework is symbolic interactionism; symbolic interactionists describe thinking as an inner conversation, and Mead called this inner dialogue 'minding' (p. 58). Minding is the reflective pause; it is the two-second delay while we mentally rehearse our next move, test alternatives, and anticipate others' reactions (Griffin et al., 2019). We naturally talk to ourselves to sort out the meaning of a difficult situation, such as perceiving or encountering an event as sexual harassment (Ibid.).

As people continue to invest in relationship-building, a possible pitfall in this social exchange is one's construct of sexual harassment. People essentially would protect themselves, their ideologies, physical selves, situations, and even dispositions towards unwelcome innuendos and discourse relating to sexually harassing perceived content. In light of the study, symbolic interactionism theory shall be used as a lens in explaining the assimilation of meanings to form perceptions about sexual harassment and how people protect themselves from the harmful message. This way, as we begin to discuss and understand the way people create and interpret sexually harassing content, we may also explain the factors affecting how people lead to this social construct of their perceived reality. One may also assign meanings through the digital body language cues exchanged online with one's digital platforms. These perceptions that may be viewed as sexually harassing, especially in online environments, need to be known and addressed.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study used mixed methods research design to answer the research questions.

Quantitative Research Strand

Participants. A random sample of 400 respondents, 200 from Ilocos Sur and 200 from Ilocos Norte, was chosen. All the respondents are 18 years old and above. Participants are all non-minors and across all genders. The majority of the participants are working already, while some are still completing their college degrees.

Data Gathering Procedure. Respondents were selected using convenient sampling and contacted through their social media accounts. The researcher asked for the respondents' consent to be part of the study. An online survey questionnaire link was given to the respondents to determine the constructs of sexual harassment.

Instrument. In determining the communication constructs, the researcher developed an online survey questionnaire adapted from the Experiences Questionnaire of Bearegard (1996), Republic Act No. 7877, and Republic Act No. 11313. Questions were organized following the verbal, visual, physical, and digital body language display of sexual harassment. The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale with the following ranks: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly Agree, and each of the constructs will be asked based on two percepts – in the context actions were done by the opposite sex and same-sex as the respondents'.

Data Analysis. Mean was used in determining the verbal, visual, physical, and digital body language communication constructs.

Qualitative Research Strand

Participants. A random sample of 10 respondents, five from Ilocos Sur and five from Ilocos Norte, shall be chosen as respondents. All the respondents are 18 years old and above.

Data Gathering Procedure. An interview was immediately scheduled after the tabulation of the survey questionnaires derived from the quantitative research strand. Each participant was interviewed through the online conference software Zoom. The interview took 30 to 45 minutes only.

Instrument. The researcher prepared an interview guide for the interviews. The interview guide is based on the survey questionnaire. This is to gather further relevant and supportive data based on the respondents' answers and narration. Zoom online application software was used in conducting the FGD.

Data Analysis. The researcher used a coding sheet to analyze the data gathered from the FGD interviews. Through coding, the conceptual abstraction of data and its reintegration as a theory takes place (Holton, 2010). Coding sheets presented the codes and categories taken from the respondents' narrations and answers.

Ethical Considerations. A Research Ethics Certificate with approval number A-21-075 was secured by submitting a research proposal and the informed consent form to the University Ethics Review Board of the University of Northern Philippines. The researcher respected the confidentiality of the respondents' identities, such as their names, addresses, and all the answers they shared. The researcher is the sole user of the computer used in storing the data and documents about the research. It is protected with a password. All backups are protected with a password as well. The study was aimed only in good faith.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Females and males have varying levels of perception of sexually harassing content on verbal, visual, physical, and digital body language constructs.

Verbal Constructs. Females strongly agree that the persistent uttering of risqué and sexist jokes (4.82), unexpected queries or comments about their sex life (4.51), and use of pick-up or hugot lines are sexually suggestive (4.52) by males are sexually harassing. However, when their co-females do these, having means of 2.26, 1.47, and 1.65, respectively, they do not perceive such acts as having sexually harassing content. This implies that females are more comfortable discussing and exchanging sex/green jokes and pick-up lines. They are also more open in accepting comments or questions about their sex life from their co-females. This corroborates with the study of Lefkowitz et al. (2004) that women were reported to be talking about sex and sex-related topics more than men and that women were also reported being more comfortable doing so with their female friends than the men. Another study supports the finding as it revealed that friendship and intimate disclosure were more highly related among women than among men (Rubin & Shenker, 1978).

Further, females agree that there is sexually harassing content when males and their co-females discuss their sex life and fantasies (3.88; 4.22), attempts to draw them into a discussion about personal or sexual matters (3.61; 4.72), calls them terms of endearment (3.57), do catcall and wolf-whistling (3.61), regularly uses sexually suggestive words (3.71; 3.46), and makes inappropriate sounds (3.64; 4.51). The results imply that the message context, in this case, is perceived as self-presentation as it involves the formal sharing of personal experiences translates to sexual harassment as females get the feeling that they are shoved into a communication situation they do not want to take part in. McCroskey (1977) explained that people make cognitive choices between behaviors for which we have positive and negative expectations, the former being chosen and the latter rejected. People tend to avoid or withdraw from perceived negative situations, and if participation is unavoidable, people show behaviors with negative expectations (Ibid. p. 28).

However, when their co-females use terms of endearment, they strongly disagree (1.33) that there is sexually harassing content in the verbal construct. The survey results point out that females are undecided (3.36) when their co-females perform catcalling and wolf-whistling. The respondents shared that females are relatively welcoming of sweet-name calling. They often use 'bes', 'bae', and 'sis' to reflect a sense of closeness or affinity with the person. The result corroborates with Afful and Nartey (2013) as they forwarded that endearment terms enhance social interaction, even when the interlocutors did not know each other and were mere acquaintances. These are forms of a creative, commonsensical, and pragmatic way of

initiating and establishing an emotional relationship and a sense of identity and belonging (Afful, 2007). For catcalling and wolf-whistling, if the act is performed in jest or synch with a joke, they perceive this as non-sexually harassing.

Moreover, they assign the act as commonly committed by a male to a female. Catcalling and wolf-whistling between female to female are rare and uncommon in the Ilokano culture. They instead assign this act dominant with males as the pursuer. Eastwood (2015) stated that the potential consequences of catcalling behaviors are sexual objectification, body-shaming; fear of rape; self-blaming; and public safety. The study forwards that women understood catcalls as a dichotomy between an innocent flirtatious act and harassment that could escalate to violence (Ibid.). Eastwood (2015) also stated that when catcalls are perceived as flirtatious, society will always be patriarchal. The results also affirm Jewel and Brown's (2013) study that men perpetrated more verbal and physical stereotypical sexualized behaviors than women. Thus, catcalling and wolf-whistling is typically perceived as male-expected committed act.

However, females strongly agree (4.52) that repeated requests from their co-females for a date despite stating uninterest has sexually harassing content. Females were observed to reject homosexuality, assign derogatory words to this act, and connect lesbian prejudices to answers given. Thus, they perceive that the repeated act is harassing in context. The result of the study is aligned with Felmlee et al. (2010) as they found that existing scholarly literature on gay men and lesbians documents several common stereotypes, including the following: an exhibition of gender-atypical traits, sexual promiscuity, and predatory sexual tendencies.

Females construct verbal sexual harassment in sex-related discourse (sex life, fantasies, suggestive words, sounds, risqué jokes, catcalls, and wolf-whistling) from males and females. And they avoid being swayed into a sexually-charged communicative event. However, some discourses are perceived as complementing their self-esteem and thus not perceived as sexually harassing such as repeated requests from males for a date despite stating uninterest. However, this is viewed as the opposite when co-females do the same act. Further, female-to-female communication on sexually-charged topics is not taken offensively (jokes, sex life, and use of hugot lines) as these are taken as light banter. Using words or terms of endearment is not perceived as sexually harassing by both males and co-females.

Males, on the other hand, agree that there is sexually harassing content when females unexpectedly ask or comment about their sex life (3.57), discuss their sex life and fantasies (4.01), attempts to draw them into a discussion of personal or sexual matters (3.77), use pick-up or sexually suggestive hugot lines (4.45), regularly uses sexually suggestive words (3.70), and requests repeatedly for a date despite being told that they are not interested (3.66). The respondents explained that the straightforwardness in how these messages are carried denotes a firm assertion from females. By this, the context of how the message is received is recognized as intimidating. Some respondents also noted that females are expected not to be too over-empowering in their discourse. Further, females were expected to hold decent conversations and not to express verbally sexually inclined messages. Words used by the respondents associated with the act were 'slut, whore, cheap, and flirty.'

In contrast, the 'imperfect woman' was stereotyped as bold, outspoken, highly modern, educated, and career-oriented. The results also imply a tendency for males to shrug off verbal sexual harassment experiences. Casario (2020) supports these findings as he studied the attitudes about victims of workplace sexual harassment. He found that male victims of sexual offenses are often unwilling to report their experiences, even more so than female victims (Scarduzio et al., 2018).

On the other hand, males strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when their co-males attempt to draw them into a discussion of personal or sexual matters (4.60), call them terms of endearment (4.86), do catcall or wolf-whistling (4.66), use pick up or sexually suggestive hugot lines (4.56), makes inappropriate sounds (4.61) and repeatedly asks them for dates even after having established that they are not interested (4.88). The results imply that males' communication discourses with sexual themes with other males border on tact and sensitivity. They consider the degree of their friendship as a factor in their communication constructs. Males also assign gender as a factor in assigning meaning to these verbal messages. The result corroborates with Fishman (1978, as cited by Maltz & Broker, 1982) that men make more direct declarations of fact or opinion, including suggestions, opinions, and "statements of orientation" as Strodbeck and Mann (1956) describe them, or "statements of focus and directives" as they are described by Soskin and John (1963). It was also forwarded that sex roles have also been central in psychological explanations (p. 171).

Males, however, are undecided in perceiving sexual content when females tell risqué/green jokes (3.19), do catcalls or wolf-whistling (3.39), and make inappropriate sounds (3.28). Based on the interview, most males are comfortable in the exchange of green jokes. They perceive these as a light discourse that means no harm, close to forms of entertainment. On the other hand, making lewd sounds such as catcalling and wolf-whistling, and inappropriate sounds are also taken lightly. The results imply that males are generally comfortable hearing risqué/green jokes from females and consider the discourse light, non-formal, and enjoyable. Also, when females perform lewd noises in a communication event, these are considered sexually pleasurable but affect the females' character.

Interestingly, males disagree that there is sexually harassing content when their co-males tell risqué/green jokes (1.86), discuss their sex life (2.14), and regularly use sexually suggestive words (1.66). They also strongly disagree about sexually harassing content when co-males unexpectedly ask or comment about their sex life (1.14). The respondents explained that males normally banter on sexual topics and words with each other, whether they may be friends or not. Discussing one's sex life with another male is perceived as establishing dominance and egoism and is considered a common male practice. The results suggest that males' sex-related communication exchanges are recognized as a form of badinage and everyday rituals among men. These are shallow exchanges, taken similarly as customary greetings for some. The result corroborates with Mohindra & Azhar (2012) that men view conversation as a means to exchange information and problem-solve. Men stay away from personal topics and discuss events, sports, news, and facts; tell more stories and jokes as a way to show status and power; are direct, and blunt, and speech includes slang or swear words (Ibid.).

Males construct sexual harassment in verbal communication when co-males and females engage them in obtrusive sexually-charged discourse (sex life, fantasies, personal sex matters, suggestive words). Males hold on to established sex-centered expectations, and perceived violations as offensive. Sexual jokes, catcalling/wolf whistling and utterance of inappropriate sounds are perceived as 'normal' in their communication styles. However, male-to-male communication is anchored in generalized jokes and authoritative discourse. Thus, personally inclined communication with sexual connotations is perceived as offensive (sex life, fantasies, pick-up lines, suggestive words, date requests).

Visual Constructs. Females strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when males provocatively touch their private body parts (4.71), exposes their private body part (4.86), plays with their tongue inside their mouth (4.63), mimics/performs masturbation (4.80), sends unwelcome sexually suggestive gestures (4.53), unwelcomely flirts (4.70), winks and whistles (4.60), and blows them a kiss (4.52). To add, females agree that there is sexual content when males leers and ogle (3.65) and display sexually offensive pictures, materials, or graffiti (3.76). The results imply that females ascertain visual messages with sexual innuendos as highly sexually harassing. These visual messages are direct sexual assault which violates their need for safe spaces and decent social dealings. This corroborates with Kearl (2012) as incidents of visual sexual harassment have made women start, frightened, and more commonly disrespected, annoyed, or angry, especially when these incidents frequently happen within a short period.

Females strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when their co-females play with their tongues inside their mouths (4.55) and leer and ogles (4.52). They also agree that there is sexually harassing content when co-females provocatively touch their private body parts (3.59), mimic masturbation (3.51), send unwelcome suggestive messages (3.50) unwelcomely flirts (3.57), and display sexually offensive pictures, and materials, or graffiti (4.33). The respondents expounded that visual messages from co-females that are not consonant with jest exchanges are provocative and upsetting. The results suggest that females perceive visual messages from co-females to thread on suitability and appropriateness. They translate visual messages plainly as sent; thus, sexual-related behaviors or acts are identified with sexual meaning. The result of the study agrees with Thorpe (2017) as she forwards that all people have the right to feel comfortable and respected in their workplaces, no matter who they are or where they work.

Females are undecided if there is sexually harassing content when co-females expose or flash their private body parts (2.62). Based on the interview, some of the respondents shared that they had experienced showing their private body parts to other females as a means of fun and to compare their bodies. The results imply that females have a degree of tolerance for each other in exposing private body parts. The act of showing private body parts is synonymous with learning and teaching one another. They feel comfortable showing private body parts as the act is identified as non-sexual and non-offensive. The results corroborate with Katz, Hannon & Whitten (1996) that the

more egalitarian the relationship, the less likely participants perceive the behavior as sexually harassing.

Lastly, females disagree with sexually harassing content when co-females wink and sexily whistle (2.34) and blow them a kiss (2.46). The respondents forwarded that females are usually communicating non-verbally through winking, but not so much in whistling. Some said that winking is an act to signify agreement. Thus, they do not interpret the act as sexually harassing. Also, females are comfortable doing 'beso-beso' or cheek-to-cheek, even when they have just met. A flying kiss acted out in synch with saying hello or goodbye to each other is not considered sexually harassing. The visual act is interpreted as a friendly gesture. The result agrees with Medina (2001) as Filipinos are known for being passionate and welcoming. They practice cheek-kissing, hugging, handshaking, and pagmamano (kissing the hand or reaching for the elder's hand and pressing it to the forehead).

Females construct visual sexually harassing content in direct male and co-female behaviors which are sexually suggestive (provocatively touching private body parts, exposing private body parts, playing with tongue inside the mouth, mimicking/performing masturbation, sending unwelcome sexually suggestive gestures, unwelcomely flirts, *winks and whistles, and *blows them a kiss, leers, and ogle and display sexually offensive pictures, materials, or graffiti). However, for co-females, exposing or flashing private body parts is perceived as a form of learning while winking, sexily whistling, and blowing kisses from co-females are taken as forms of female bonding.

Males strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when females provocatively touch their private body parts (4.73), play with their tongue (4.62), mimic masturbation (4.51), and unwelcomely flirt with them (4.64). Results also showed that males agree there is sexual harassment content when females send unwelcomely suggestive gestures (3.64) and display sexually offensive pictures, materials, or graffiti (4.27). The respondents explained that visual manifestations of sexual harassment are more pronounced than verbal. Although some of the males said that if they like the female doing these acts, they may urge the female to continue. However, if they are not interested in the person, they feel uncomfortable and translate the act as sexually offensive.

Nonetheless, although they perceive highly sexually harassing content, they may brush off the event and 'forget' about the incident. The results imply that males' discernment of visual sexual harassment

is affected by their degree of likeness towards the female. Romantic relationships can occur in the context of one or different cultures. Attitudes towards them and the way people manifest them could vary from culture to culture (Navarro, et al., 2020). This impacts their feelings and identification of the act, be it enjoyment or otherwise an act they may dismiss. This finding conforms with Castello et al. (1990) as their study found that physical attractiveness can play an essential role in judging people involved in sexual harassment.

Males are undecided if there is sexually harassing content when females expose their private body parts (2.99), leer or ogle (3.40), wink, and sexily whistle. Further, they disagree that there is sexual harassment content when females blow them a kiss (1.99). The respondents forward that accidents may happen that result in the exposure of private body parts. However, if these were deliberate actions, they would still not feel offended. Some respondents mentioned that most males are comfortable and used to seeing female bodies, intentional or not. Staring can be considered normal behavior; some males identify the act as a joke; they cannot help when females are mesmerized by their looks. Moreover, winking is taken as a non-verbal sign of agreement, while whistling and blowing kisses are perceived as sexual but non-offending acts.

On the other hand, males strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when their co-males expose their private body parts (4.61), leer and ogles (4.52), unwelcomely flirt (4.79), wink and sexily whistle (4.54), blows a kiss (4.62) and displays sexually offensive pictures, material or graffiti (4.74). They also agree that there is sexually harassing content when co-males provocatively touch their private body parts (4.25), play with their tongue (4.33), and send unwelcome suggestive gestures (4.23). The respondents expounded that males are generally not expressive towards each other with visual messages. They view male standards based on this construct; thus, when their co-males act outside these perceived standards, they are viewed as sexually offensive. The findings are explained further by Stockdale, Visio & Batra (1999) that male same-sex sexual harassment occurs because targeted men do not fit their offenders' gender-role stereotype of heterosexual hypermasculinity.

Lastly, males are undecided if there is sexual content when their co-males mimic masturbation (3.36). The respondents stated that males are usually throwing sex jokes with one another. Moreover, the act of masturbating, and other sexual movements, may be taken as usual banter. Males do not identify the actions as serious, and it evokes

male communication anchored in jest, male-to-male rapport, and delight.

Males construct visual sexually harassing content in direct sexual behaviors from co-males and females (provocatively touching their private body parts, playing with their tongue, mimicking masturbation, unwelcomely flirting, unwelcomely suggestive gestures, and displaying sexually offensive pictures, materials, or graffiti). These are taken as sexually offensive when males are not attracted to the message sender, or when the degree of relationship is not first established. The notion of having welcome and unwelcomed messages is used in gauging visual content. However, female behaviors which are perceived to give pleasure are not perceived as sexually harassing (exposing their private body parts, leers or ogling, winking, sexily whistling, and blowing them a kiss).

For male-to-male communication, visual constructs are pronounced in direct sexual behaviors, and these are taken as unwelcomed (exposing private body parts, leers, and ogles, unwelcomely flirting, winking and sexily whistling, blowing a kiss and displaying sexually offensive pictures, material or graffiti, provocatively touch their private body parts, play with their tongue, and send unwelcome suggestive gestures). However, mimicking masturbation is perceived as “normal” visual behavior and taken as signs of play, thus, not sexually offensive.

Physical Constructs. Females strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when males deliberately brush their body against theirs (4.57), kiss inappropriately (4.61), touch their hair or clothes (4.67), surprisingly give them a back massage (4.54), and regularly tickle them even after stating that they are uncomfortable (4.63). Also, females agree that there is sexually harassing content when males unwelcomely come close to them and enter their personal space (3.89), unexpectedly touch or caress their body (3.58), touch or grab them unintentionally (4.24), hug inappropriately (3.60), and inappropriately blocks their path (3.86). They welcome close physical contact with people they already share relationships with. Females highly value physical distance, and once this is violated, the act, be it unintentional or not, is translated into something offensive and personal. The results imply that physical distance creates meaning within the communication event for females. They safeguard their personal space and welcome persons from the opposite sex with established ties. Actions violating their space will be interpreted as infuriating and sexually inappropriate.

Females agree that there is sexual harassment content when their co-females unwelcomely come close and enter their personal space (3.68) and surprisingly give a back or neck massage (3.92). The respondents expressed their value for personal space. Although they welcome co-females within some boundaries of physical constructs, they maintain that unwelcome violation of personal space is offensive to them. The respondents also forwarded that touching erogenous zones is taken as an intrusion into their privacy. The results suggest that females value physical distance in their communication styles. They have high regard for the proximity in their social dealings, and when others invade or ignore social space, females feel uncomfortable and offended in the communication process. The results reflected the study of Sahgal & Dang (2017) when they said that while the number of sexual harassment cases is staggering, little is known about the experience that women go through when their personal space and dignity are violated. Furthermore, they reported that behavioral sexual harassment was more prevalent than verbal.

Further, females are undecided if there is sexually harassing content when co-females deliberately brush or rub their body against them (2.87), kiss inappropriately (3.46), hug inappropriately (2.72), surprisingly touch hair and clothes (3.35), inappropriately block their path (3.03), and regularly tickles them even after informing the other that they are uncomfortable (3.39). The respondents mentioned gender as a determining factor in contextualizing the physical constructs. The results imply that gender, affinity, and likeness affect how females construe physical constructs about sexual harassment with co-females. They maintain a tolerating disposition with co-females and brush off physical actions as uncontrollable and amiable signs. In general, the females [students] indicate that the gender of the harasser is not the most important determinant of sexual harassment, but rather the victim's feelings of disgust and discomfort.

Females construct physical sexual harassment in males' and co-females' deliberate actions which violate proxemics, and create undesirable feelings due to body touching (deliberately brushing their body against theirs, kisses inappropriately, touching their hair or clothes, surprisingly giving them a back massage, and regularly tickles them even after stating that they are uncomfortable, unwelcomely come close and enter personal space, unexpectedly touches or caresses their body, touches or grabs unintentionally, hugs inappropriately, and inappropriately blocks their path). Females perceive friendly female gestures (deliberately brushing or rubbing their body against them, kisses inappropriately, hugs inappropriately,

surprisingly touching hair and clothes, inappropriately blocking their path, regularly tickling them even after informing the other that they are uncomfortable, unexpectedly touching, inappropriately touch, and grab them unintentionally) as generally unwelcome, but not sexually offensive. The meaning assigned to these actions may vary depending on the degree of relationship, and likeness.

Males strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when females and co-males unwelcomely come close and enter their personal space (4.62; 4.70), kiss them inappropriately (4.72; 4.56), surprisingly touches hair and clothes (4.51; 4.72), inappropriately blocks their path (4.75; 4.63), surprisingly gives a back/neck massage (4.71; 4.82), and regularly tickles them even after saying that it makes them uncomfortable (4.63; 4.78). Males agree and strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when females and their co-males, respectively, unexpectedly touch (4.02; 4.67), inappropriately touch (4.04; 4.66), deliberately brush or rub their body against theirs (3.90; 4.62), and hugs inappropriately (4.12; 4.78). The respondents explained that males are not touchy in their communication styles. They maintain social distance from females and co-males in both informal and formal or professional settings. Males tend to share intimate relations with people they allow in their personal space. The results imply and validate the earlier findings of this study in males; they value personal space, seldom use haptics and gestures in their communication styles, and gauge a level of acceptance of physical constructs based on the degree of the relationship, gender, and communication event. Men use touch more to show dominance, including pats, back slaps, and shoulder touches (PointPark University, 2021).

Males construct physical sexual harassment when females and co-males violate proxemics, and blatantly perform unwelcome messages (unwelcomely coming close and entering their personal space, kissing them inappropriately, surprisingly touching hair and clothes, inappropriately blocking their path, surprisingly giving a back/neck massage and regularly tickles them even after saying that it makes them uncomfortable, unexpectedly touches, inappropriately touches, deliberately brushes or rubs their body against theirs, and hugs inappropriately).

Digital Body Language. Females strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when males and co-females breathe in the mouthpiece (4.73; 4.54), use sexually suggestive stickers or gifs (4.74; 4.57), sends photos of their private parts or porn (4.56; 4.70), edit and share lewd images (4.60; 4.56), repeatedly tags or sends information

about sex (4.70; 4.72), and often post sexist or rape comments in their social media sites (4.52; 3.71). They also agreed that there is sexually harassing content when males engage in video chats while wearing revealing clothes (4.36). The respondents explained that online constructs of sexual harassment are now too evident with multimedia platforms. The paralanguage in verbal communication depends not just on tone, pitch, and volume but also the manner (hoarseness, airy, sexy, etc.) and delivery style (pauses, stress, background music/noise, etc.). The results imply that multimedia settings provide a whole array of channels for sexual harassment acts. Non-verbal paralanguage is a prominent cue in detecting sexual harassment in voice channels; non-verbal objects such as clothing in males also create sexual contexts, while text and images which are sexually suggestive are perceived as sexually harassing. Biber et al. (2004) forward that misogynist comments were seen as more harassing online than in traditional settings and using nicknames and comments about the dress. Thus, direct use of language with sexual content is viewed positively as sexually harassing. Manner (appropriateness) and expressions embedded in the use of the channel may be taken into consideration in the communication event.

Females disagree that there is sexually harassing content when males incessantly keep texting/chatting with no immediate concern (2.26) and strongly disagree when their co-females do this too (1.19). Females disagree with sexually harassing content when males and co-females persistently call with no valid reason (2.25; 1.74). They also disagree that there is sexually harassing content when males and co-females use smileys in chat (2.42; 1.46). The respondents explained that these might be signs of interest and friendly flirting for males. These actions and gestures from males generate a complimenting feeling and are perceived as acceptable. Some of the respondents forwarded that smileys or emoticons such as smiling and laughing are generally acceptable. They asserted that males do not use smileys and emoticons that often in chat conversations. Thus, when males use these, it may mean a heightened emotion, and thus, a deeper intention such that they are interested in getting to know the female. Lohmann et al. (2017) support this as computer-mediated communication (CMC) is inherent in our daily interactions. However, they forward that CMC is associated with limited options to express emotions and, thus, impairs smooth interactions.

The respondents also explained that females usually call one another with a reason as motivation. These motivations may range from formal (professional, business, meetings) to non-formal (gossip, and kamustahan). Their level of friendship also matters in these scenarios.

Thus, when the motivation does not fall within these definitions, and the co-female is not a 'close friend, they may get uncomfortable with repeated calls with no valid reason. The feeling brings discomfort relating to 'stalker-like harassment. The results imply that verbal online communication is used in established relationships amongst females. They use this in formal and informal discourse, which aids in relationship building. As with chat functions, female-to-female online communication follows appropriate and set conventions, dependent on their degree of affinity.

Females disagree that there is sexually harassing content when co-females engage in video chats wearing revealing clothes (2.48). The respondents explained that females' clothing preferences, even in face-to-face settings, should not be associated with any context of sexual harassment. Some had heightened emotions in relating female fashion to the debate of sexually inviting rape or harassment. Although they forward that females should follow decent attire such as corporate during formal professional online communications. The results imply that females regard clothes choice as a free expression.

Females construct males' digital body language as sexually harassing in multimedia messages which directly expose skin (video chats while wearing revealing clothes), breathe through mouthpieces, and use sexually suggestive icons, photos, and text. Sensitive message contents are also perceived as sexually offensive (rape). However, males and co-females who incessantly keep texting/chatting with no immediate concern are generally tolerated. They also do not perceive sexually harassing content when co-females engage in video chats wearing revealing clothes.

Males strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when females and co-males breathe in the mouthpiece/microphone (3.75; 4.73), use online stickers or gifs which is sexually suggestive (4.74; 4.51), send pictures of their private parts or videos/porn (4.56; 4.51), edit and share lewd images of me (4.60; 4.50), repeatedly tags or sends me sex trivia/information/content (4.70; 4.51), and engage in video chats while wearing revealing clothes (4.36; 4.51). They also strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when females often post sexist or rape comments/jokes on their social media sites (4.52). The respondents explained that sex-related topics, sex manifestations, and sex hints sent online are suggestive of sexually harassing content on the condition that they are not interested in females. However, despite strongly agreeing that there is sexually harassing content in these acts, males do not necessarily mean they feel violated or uncomfortable in the online communication setting.

They further clarified that they might easily dismiss their perception of doubt of online content with sexually charged messages. The Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (2021) supports the results that say male sexual assault has historically been shrouded in secrecy and stigma. Our culture values invulnerability and denial of pain as essential qualities of “manliness (Ibid.).”

Co-males perceive the acts to be inappropriate and suggestive of a gender issue; gay or bisexual sexual advances. Male respondents also said that sexually inclined messages are on-spot using images, gifs, and emoticons. Thus, they may easily catch on sexually charged messages sent to them online. These are interpreted as unwanted and create emotionally charged feelings of disgust and awkwardness. They also interpret visuals and audio in their literal sense and meaning. Thus, a sexy, sultry voice will project as instigating flirting and arousal. They can ascribe these to sexually harassing content, especially if the sender is someone they are not interested in. Scarduzio & Geist-Martin (2008) mentions that narratives of sexual harassment reveal men’s sense of disembodiment, discomfort, and displacement throughout their attempts to make sense of their sexual harassment experiences.

Males strongly disagree there is sexually harassing content when females incessantly keep texting/chatting with no immediate concern (1.32), persistently call with no valid reason (1.83), and use smileys in chat conversations (1.30). The respondents shared that it is a common experience for them that females are pressing and nagging even on online communication platforms. They also shared that females overly use emoticons which is already an inappropriate act in itself. Males feel that females are simply “making pa-cute” or getting their attention and performing friendly flirting when they do these actions online. They ascribe females as 'running after them' and view the acts as complementing rather than harassing. The results are linked with Malòn’s (2009) study on erotic experiences. They found that many [victims] could be active participants in these relationships (Ibid.). It was apparent that [victims] obtained some satisfaction from experience.

However, males strongly agree that there is sexually harassing content when co-males incessantly keep texting/chatting with no immediate concern (4.60), persistently call with no valid reason (4.56), and use smileys in chat conversations (4.61). The respondents stated that males use online communication platforms to communicate directly; thus, motivation for getting in touch is permanently established. They also mentioned that they usually call

often or engage in face-to-face interpersonal communication with co-males. They use text or chat often for information-sharing purposes. They do not use chat or text, often informal or civil relationships, except for email, with co-males.

Moreover, conversation styles are often direct to the point, with minimal or no use of emoticons or smileys. Thus, persistent calling/texting and using smileys in chat/text are identified as "making pa-cute," similar to how females behave online. The results imply that males' communication styles are direct to the point and short. They speak on point and use online communication platforms with specific intentions and motivations. Chat and text are more pronounced in personal or intimate relationships than formal and civil. Scarduzio & Geist-Martin (2008) said that although the differences in male and female responses have been noted often, few studies focus exclusively on male experiences of sexual harassment.

Males construct females' digital body language as sexually harassing in message postings about sensitive topics (sexist, rape comments). They are also not bothered when females incessantly keep texting/chatting with no immediate concern, persistently call with no valid reason, and use smileys in chat conversations. However, males construct DBL sexually harassing content when females and co-males explicitly commit sexually-charged behavior (breathe in the mouthpiece/microphone, use online stickers or gifs which is sexually suggestive, send pictures of their private parts or videos/porn, edit and share lewd images of me, repeatedly tags or sends me sex trivia/information/content, and engage in video chats while wearing revealing clothes. Males further perceive offensive content when co-males behave inappropriately (incessantly keep texting/chatting with no immediate concern, persistently call with no valid reason, and use smileys in chat conversations) in regular male-to-male communication. Appropriateness is deeply anchored in the degree of relationship, gender, and within the communication setting. Males also perceive topics on sex as 'regular'/normal. Thus, posts on sexist or rape comments/ sexual jokes on social media sites are perceived as enjoyable, and entertaining.

Males and Females construe sexual harassment

Females and males construe sexual harassment following the themes identified during data analysis. Themes are presented based on the frequency of verbatim answers gathered in the interviews. The following assertions present how females and males construct sexual harassment:

Sender-Recipient Gender and Sex. The respondents identified that both the sender and receiver's gender and sex create meaning in the verbal, visual, physical, and digital body language constructs as components of their perception of sexual harassment. Gender and sex contribute to one's perception and weigh in on what constitutes sexual harassment. Females are more likely to feel sexually harassed by the opposite sex, while males feel more sexually harassed by co-males, leaving an impression that the 'harasser' [person] is gay or bi-sexual.

Females perceive communication exchanges with sexual content as less sexually offensive as these are initially taken as forms of jokes or light exchanges. With the same message content, females tend to interpret sexual harassment content from the opposite sex more than from co-females.

While men, on the other hand, are inclined to interpret the message to have sexually harassing content when it is coming from their co-males. Males rarely direct sex-related jokes toward each other. These are usually generalized, and when messages are directed with personal innuendos towards them by their co-males, they interpret these as sexually harassing. With the same message content, males are likely to interpret sex-related messages from females as flirting rather than sexual harassment.

This implies that the meaning embedded within the communication exchange differs according to the sexes of both the sender and recipient. The meaning will have a perceived offending nature; sexually harassing content, dependent on the sex of the encoder and decoder of the message. The assigned sex and gender roles people account for maintaining the degree of expectations within the communication event. If these expectations were violated with sexually charged messages, then the message will be interpreted as sexually harassing.

Degree of Intimacy in Relationships. The respondents emphasized the degree of intimacy within a relationship by the sender and receiver as a significant criterion in constructing sexual harassment. Females and males both agreed that persons sharing close intimate, and untroubled relationships are less likely to interpret sex-related messages as sexually harassing; they even perceive establishing ties, bonding, flirting, intimate teasing, and even foreplay.

However, for persons engaged in communication who does not have an established intimate relationship, such as in a professional

setting, cordial friendships, civil relations, and with strangers, messages with sex-related content are perceived to be highly sexually harassing. These exchanges are unwelcome and viewed unpleasantly.

This implies that sexual harassment is construed based on one's degree of shared intimacy with other people. The degree of intimacy follows that people within the relationship have established strong ties and feel a common likeness and fondness for each other. Lobel, Quinn, St. Clair & Warfield (1994) support this finding. They found that psychologically intimate work relationships are characterized by affection and concern for one another, shared attitudes, and affirmations of their worth and accomplishments. Communication takes place in profound, rich ways and involves high levels of self-disclosure, a sense of trust, and sometimes the ability to predict the reactions of the other (Ibid.).

Setting. The respondents mentioned the setting as a component in constructing sexually harassing content. Setting in this study refers to the physical or virtual environment where the communication is taking place. This implies that sexual harassment is construed following the chances of social interaction and the circumstance of the event. Males and females identify the setting as it relates to how events trigger negative emotions within the communication. Such settings or circumstances are defined by how individuals behave and act toward one another. The setting opens encounter situations for individuals to either take advantage of a situation or to remain civil and polite. The results are related to the work of Kearl (2014) in her study on *Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Street Harassment Report*. The study mentions that street harassment does not occur in a vacuum, it includes unwanted physical forms, and it can escalate into rape, non-sexual assault, and even murder (Ibid.).

Non-verbal Communication. Lastly, the respondents mentioned that non-verbal cues impact the message's meaning and thus, affect how they perceive the communication event as sexually harassing. Common non-verbal types fall under oculosics (eye movement), gestures (hand movement), haptics (touch), proxemics (distance), and objects. These non-verbal communications affect the message content as people believe actions more than verbal utterings.

Non-verbal communication is typically done in a one-on-one level of communication between the sender and the receiver. These messages were described to be subtle but direct. Both females and

males agreed that non-verbal communication in sexual harassment is the easiest to construct, coming from a recipient/victim perspective, but unfortunately, one that is most difficult to prove.

This follows the characteristics of nonverbal being powerful but ambiguous. This implies that sexual harassment is construed in non-verbal communication and often directed through interpersonal communication. It is communicated directly to the receiver by a sender and elicits an instant reaction. This then becomes a basis for the sender if the act continues or sends off an alarm to stop the act committed. In sexual harassing contexts, the act is usually sustained. Mamaru, Getachew & Mohammed (2015) forwards a prevalence of physical, verbal, and nonverbal sexual harassment. Moreover, these forms of sexual harassment are higher and strongly associated with psychological distress (Ibid.). Anwar, Österman & Björkqvist (2019) also supports the findings as they forward that non-verbal sexual harassment was one of the most frequent types of sexual harassment and may be carried out through staring with dirty looks, blocking a person's path, following, whistling, and humming of filthy songs in your presence.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With all of the findings of this study, the conclusions could be made on three salient points in this research:

1. females and males have varying levels of perception of sexually harassing content on verbal, visual, physical, and digital body language constructs;
2. the levels of perception of sexually harassing content are more pronounced in female-to-female and male-to-male communication events; and
3. the construct of sexual harassment is influenced by the following assertions: sender-recipient gender and sex, degree of intimacy in relationships, setting, and non-verbal communication.

Recommendations for further studies on the construction of sexual harassment are presented as follows:

Policy sciences. There is no one-fits-all policy in sexual harassment as gender and sex become two prevailing assertions that influence how individuals perceive sexual harassment. There is a need, therefore, for policies in various organizations including both private companies and government institutions in different sectors such as health, education, business, and government offices, to be revisited and aligned to accommodate gender-specific needs.

Human resources and Guidance and Counselling. The HRMO of private and government offices and Guidance and Counselling departments of academic institutions should promote information and educational communication campaigns and materials to iron out issues on sexual harassment.

Computer-mediated communication. There is more to cover in computer-mediated communication as the world is shifting to information communication technologies. Further studies may be explored by students and professionals on how computer-mediated platforms are utilized to mitigate and stop sexual harassment in these channels as results may be transformed into educational materials for further knowledge-sharing.

Misinterpretation and miscommunication. The point of view of unsuspecting subjects perceived to have committed sexual harassment was not part of this study's scope. There is a need to include their voice in separate literature to iron out elements and characteristics that may explain how individuals miscommunicate sexual harassment.

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