

STUDY SAYS THE LUST THAT DRIVES SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE IS POWER NOT SEX



A new Youth Development Study, authored by Amy Blackstone a sociology professor at University of Maine, along with two sociologists at the University of Minnesota, Professor Chris Uggen and Ph.D. candidate Heather McLaughlin, belies popular belief and reveals that it's not the new vulnerable secretary or the college intern or the junior associate who are subjected to sexual harassment at the workplace, but the female supervisors who are, in reality, sexually harassed more. Researchers at the University of Maine and the University of Minnesota analyzed the study which was based on interaction with 1,010 individuals and spoke about their experiences when they were high school freshmen and when they were around 30 years of age. 33 of these people were interviewed at length. Female supervisors faced sexually harassing conduct 138 percent more than the others and experienced it 73 percent more often than those who were not supervisors, according to the analysis. Female supervisors in male dominated professions, like the police force or construction and women who breached conventional feminine roles and made inroads into male professions were most likely to be targets of sexual harassment. Another surprising revelation was that, it was not the youthful, sexy and vulnerable who were more at risk, the less feminine women were sexually harassed more. One reason why the supervisors are more prone to be sexually harassed is that it is a way of keeping a powerful woman "in her place," conveying a message that she is a mere 'body' and not an equal. "What better way to keep someone in their place than to humiliate them using sexual behaviors?" says Blackstone, one of the authors of the study. The study reports that it is easier to harass women in male dominated workplaces, because the chances of the woman reporting it are less. Women in such jobs feel isolated and are keener to prove that they are equal to their male counterparts. A woman, Holly told the authors, that she was the first woman in senior management at her firm. She says she was groped throughout a company dinner by a powerful client, who amongst other things, touched her legs under the table and tried to unhook her bra. She says she was targeted, perhaps, because she was the only female present. Another female interviewed said that her male colleagues would pour water on her when she was wearing a white T-Shirt, so that her breasts could be seen. These mischief, she said, only occurred when three or more men were present. Sexual harassment suits in the 70s and 80s were all brought by women against their male bosses. Perhaps in those days, there weren't too many female bosses. Lawsuits included senior executives coercing juniors into sex and demanding sexual favors. "Harassing women in the 70s and 80s in the workplace was a way of keeping them in their place as well," says Blackstone: sending the message that they're not welcome in the workplace at all. Today women are seen and largely accepted in all industries and occupying high-positions. The analysis feels that as they climb higher, sexual harassment is one way to try and bring them down or, as the study says, "grease up the rungs so they're not so easy to cling to." The study has confirmed what feminist advocates have been crying hoarse for so many years, that the lust that drives sexual harassment is not sex but power. Uncalled for touching and filthy jokes aren't signs of a crush but a way to crush a woman's self esteem.