Online Commentary Regarding Workplace Harassment

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This study aimed to examine online commentary about enacted workplace harassment conflict to determine the applicability of existing, functional definitions of workplace harassment in this new context. Online comments (N=721) were analyzed through an inductive thematic analysis to identify trends in women's commentary about harassment in the workplace. The analysis developed nine themes of content evident in women's discourse about workplace harassment as well as characteristics of each content theme which were compared to literature on harassment conflict. The study confirms that current, definitions of harassment closely relate to how women describe workplace harassment conflict in this new, mediated context.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict, Employee Voice, Feminism, Employee Attitudes, Harassment

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, 53 percent of female survey participants working in the technology industry in Silicon Valley said they experienced sexual harassment and 37 percent reported witnessing it (Lincoln Park Strategies, 2017). Additionally, females (Feldblum, & Lipnic, 2016) filed about 83 percent of the nearly 7,000 sexual harassment complaints in 2016 examined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. However, these reports likely do not accurately reflect the number of harassment instances that occur in the workplace. According to Feldblum and Lipnic (2016), three quarters of harassment victims never report their experiences or file claims. Women choose not to report sexual harassment events for several reasons to include (1) they perceive every other woman in the organization is also experiencing the same harassment, (2) they believe there will be no consequences for the perpetrator, and (3) they become accustomed to harassment as part of their work life (Firger, 2012). 'This veil of secrecy protects serial harassers by keeping other potential victims in the dark and minimizing pressure on companies to fire predators' (Carlson, 2017, p. A27).

To combat this issue, organizations are attempting to minimize harassment in the workplace by creating anti-harassment policies (DOL, 201; Dougherty & Goldstein, 2016) and offering harassment training (Levin, 2016). While policies and trainings offer awareness of the functional definitions of workplace harassment, these strategies may prove inadequate for eradicating harassment in the workplace due to ambiguous definitions and confused perceptions of what qualifies as harassment (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2013; Gordon, Cohen, Grauer & Rogelbert, 2005; Pierucci, Echterhoff, Marchal, & Klein, 2014; Toker, 2016).

Indeed, many types of incivility can exist in the workplace and there is a vast range of perspectives employees may hold regarding these behaviors (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2012). For example, there are copious opinions on the concepts of bullying (Dolan & Oliver, 2009; Saunders, Huynh, & Goodman-Delahunty, 2007; Soylu & Sheehy, 2015), online harassment (Duggan, 2014; McDonald, 2012), sexual harassment (McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Toker, 2016), and workplace violence (Boyle & Wallis, 2016). These varying perspectives may prevent a clear understanding of how harassment in the workplace is truly experienced, described, and defined.

Therefore, this study seeks to connect the functional definitions of workplace harassment with enacted workplace harassment conflict reports as they occur online. A comparison was conducted of women's online, anonymous self-reports of harassment to the characteristics of foundational definitions. Specifically seeking to understand the explicate relationship between how official organizations view workplace harassment and how women experience harassment. Clarifying this relationship may serve as a foundation for developing more effective policies and training.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For this study, it was postulated that women's comments on gender inequality in the workplace would reveal self-reports of harassment conflict that could be analyzed to develop a grounded description of harassment. Therefore, the following research questions were assessed:

RQ1: What communicative themes are evident in women's online commentary about workplace harassment conflict?

RQ2: Do the communicative themes evidenced in women's online commentary about workplace harassment conflict align with previously established descriptions and definitions of harassment?

The answers to these questions allow for a comparison of the way that official organizations, legal professionals, and academic scholars define harassment. This comparison may assist the effort in clarifying an understanding of workplace harassment as it is experienced, described, and defined in modern organizations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to expand research concerning the discourse in which women engage regarding conflict centered on workplace harassment. There is significant research on women's experiences of workplace harassment conflict often derived from survey-based methodologies (McDonald, 2012). While many scholars have attempted to describe women's experiences with harassment from this approach, there is a shortage of information regarding how women self-disclose information about workplace harassment, especially in public, online forums. As research in the online commentary of women, this study recapitulates the experiences of women as they engage in anonymous, public disclosure. This may facilitate a more grounded approach to the exploration of harassment conflict descriptions and definitions.

Additionally, the answers to these research questions provide a framework for examining the relationship between the definitions of workplace harassment and the disparate experiences of enacted workplace harassment conflict. By exploring the thematic content of the harassment commentary, a connection to previous research definitions and descriptions is articulated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past 30 years, the definition of harassment has been developed and refined depending based on the function for the definition (Claybourn, Spinner & Malcom, 2014; Fitzgerald, 1993; Gutek, 1995; Pater, Kim, Mynatt & Fiesler, 2016; Popovich, Gehlauf, Jolton, Somers, & Godinho, 1992; Powell,

1986). The following review of literature is not presented as a comprehensive overview of workplace harassment literature. Rather, it has the purpose of reviewing current, functional definitions of workplace harassment as a basis for later comparison to the study results. The literature-based definitions are grouped in this review by (1) U.S. federal agency definitions, (3) U.S. Supreme Court rulings and (3) academic research.

U.S. Federal Agency Definition of Harassment

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2018a) defines harassment as 'unwelcomed conduct based on any number of characteristics including race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), and disability or genetic information' (para. 2). Further,

> Harassment becomes unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive (EEOC, 2018b, para. 2).

The U.S. Department of Labor (2018) defines two basic and unlawful types of harassment to include Quid Pro Quo Harassment and Hostile Work Environment Harassment. Quid Pro Quo harassment results when tangible employment decisions are based upon an employee's willingness to engage in unwelcomed behavior in exchange for rewards related to employment (DOL, 2018). Hostile Work Environment Harassment results from unwelcome conduct of supervisors, co-workers or customers to the victim resulting in a climate that is intimidating, hostile or offensive (DOL, 2018). The U.S. federal agency definitions emphasize that harassment involves behaviors against the victim that are unwelcomed, severe and/or requiring of a conditional response.

U.S. Supreme Court Rulings

Based on a review of U.S. Supreme Court rulings, the perspective of the law regarding what constitutes harassment can be outlined. The U.S. Supreme Court has concluded that employers have a responsibility to create a psychologically safe environment (Dion, 1999) and that harassment does contribute to a psychologically unsafe environment (Vredenburgh & Zackowitz, 2002). Harassment can include sexual harassment, same-sex workplace harassment, co-worker harassment, or supervisor-to-employee harassment (Henley, 1998; McEvers, 1996; Purser, 1998). Finally, a supervisor has been defined as someone having the ability to make decisions about another employees' work environment, safety, workload, and promotions (Shumeyko, 2010). Table 1 provides a brief chronological overview of a few instrumental U.S. Supreme Court cases that, together, have contributed to the contemporary, functional conceptualization of harassment.

TABLE 1
U.S. SUPREME COURT RULINGS ON WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Case	Date	Finding
Roger v. EEOC	1975	First case to recognize a hostile work environment as a form of illegal employment discrimination.
Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson	1986	First sexual harassment class action suit in the United States.
Harris v. Forklift Systems	1993	Supreme Court ruled that, in a sexual harassment case, the plaintiff does not have to prove concrete psychological harm to establish at Title VII violation.
Faragher v. City of Boca Raton	1998	The case concluded that employers of a supervisory employee who sexually harass subordinates will be vicariously liable.
Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth	1998	United States Supreme Court again concludes that employers are liable if supervisors create a hostile work environment for their employees.
Vance v. Ball State	2006	The case determined the harassing individual must have the ability to make decisions about employees' work environment, safety, workload, promotions, etc. to be considered a supervisor.
Crawford v. Metropolitan Government of Nashville	2009	The United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act protects employees who opposes unlawful sexual harassment but do not report the harassment themselves.

Justia. (2018). *US case law*: *US Supreme Court*. Retrieved on September 13, 2018 from https://law.justia.com/cases/

Academic Literature

For decades, U.S. federal agencies and the legal system have sought to define harassment in the workplace through methodical application and presentation of law. Academics and researchers have also made efforts to further understand and define workplace harassment through research. The following is a review of relevant research studies that have contributed to defining workplace harassment.

While hostile behaviors at work have long been experienced, incivility in the workplace was not systematically researched until the early 1980s (Leymann, 1996). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, researchers began to note that, in some circumstances; groups of employees could target a single employee and subject him or her to ongoing psychological harassment that could result in severe mental and occupational consequences for the victim (Leymann, 1990). In 1996, Leymann (1996) called these coordinated group attacks 'mobbing' and offered the definition as,

> Psychological aggression that often involved a group of 'mobbers' rather than a single person. Theoretically, mobbing is an extreme type of social stressor at work. Unlink 'normal' social stressors; mobbing is a long-lasting, escalated conflict with frequent harassing actions systematically aimed at a target person (p. 165).

Mobbing recognizes harassment as aggression that is sustained, escalating, and systematic.

As acknowledgement of workplace harassment grew, researchers began to examine the various types of harassment. Raver and Nishii (2010) worked to gain an understanding of three types of workplace harassment to include (1) ethnic harassment (EH), (2) gender harassment (GH), and (3) generalizable workplace harassment (GWH). The researchers found that EH, GH, and GWH have significant negative effects on the target and harassment is perceived differently based on gender and culture (Raver & Nishii, 2010).

Recognizing that different people experience harassment in different ways led many researchers to pursue a definition of harassment that could meet the needs of diverse employees and organizations.

Griend and Messias (2014) explored the development of an expansive, transdisciplinary definition that recognizes workplace violence within all contexts of work, not just paid employment. They identified the need for a broad definition based on contemporary, boundary-less work environments and their assessments of the potential expansive risks that occur with exposure to workplace harassment (Griend & Messias, 2014).

As understanding of potential risks associated with workplace hostility grew, researchers further investigated potential individualized employee consequences linked with unhampered incivility. Khubchandani and Price (2015) assessed a sample of US workers by exploring both prevalence as well as the psychological/physical health consequences of experiencing workplace harassment. Within the research, it was concluded that workplace harassment in the United States is associated with significant health risks and morbidity (Khubchandani & Price, 2015).

With a compelling body of literature devoted to understanding harassment in the workplace, there are some overlapping research conclusions. The studies agree that, for behavior in the workplace to be considered harassment, it must be frequent, escalating, systematic, an offense against dignity, cause consequences for the target in several domains, and result in distress for the target. Figure 1 is a summary of workplace harassment characteristics based on U.S. federal agency definitions, academic literature, and U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

FIGURE 1
SUMMARY OF LITERATURE ON WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Academic Literature	Federal Agency	Supreme Court Rulings
• Frequent • Escalating conflict • Systematic • Offenses against dignity • Consequences in several domains • Varying cultural perspectives • Results in physical or psychological distress to the target	• Unwelcomed • Severe • Conditional	• Hostile or intolerable work environment • Sexual harassment violates Title VII • Concrete proof of psychological harm does not have to be established. • Employers are responsible for supervisory actions • A secondary party can report the harassment

METHOD

In order to expand on academic literature as well as compare the U.S. federal agency definitions and U.S. Supreme Court rulings to commentary on enacted workplace harassment conflict, this study utilized inductive thematic analysis to explore women's online, public commentary about harassment conflict. The established themes of communicative content from the inductive analysis were created to compare to existing literature to identify any trends and discrepancies.

Data Collection
Data for this study was collected from the publicly available, United States based website *InHerSight* (2018) that is primarily designed for women to report on their experiences concerning gender equality at

current or previous employers. A welcome message was provided to establish a purpose for communication within the website, which was stated as the following:

> At InHerSight, our mission is to improve the workplace for women by measuring it. We bring women's insights together into a common framework to show what's working and what's not at companies, and to help more women find their ideal workplace (InHerSight, 2018, para. 1).

This study is primarily concerned with the commentary sections of the website in which women can comment on their experiences with an employer. Specifically, women are prompted at the end of a series of ranking questions with the following:

Share your insights about working at [your employer]. This will be shown publicly, so be constructive and keep it classy (no bad language, names, personal information, industry secrets, etc.)' (InHerSight, 2018b, para.1).

Women's commentary on their experiences, as gathered for this study, were posted responses to this prompt. As the commentary provided is public, the identities of the commenters are concealed, and any information is publicly posted by the commenter, the study could occur without permission from the forum owner or participants (Convery & Cox, 2012).

Sample

The online commentary selected for examination in this study was gathered from an online source, InHerSight.com, as collected from November 2017- February 2018. Dates for the analyzed comments were not provided and could have been made at any time between the time of the study and the inception of the website. In an effort to obtain a large number of comments from multiple organizations at potentially varying levels of the employee hierarchy, only companies with greater than 10,000+ employees as indicated within the websites search engine were retrieved for analysis. This resulted in a sample of comments *(N=*731) totaling 43 433 words, or approximately 61 pages of single-spaced text.

From this initial sample, comments were identified for their potential relationship to workplace harassment. This resulted in a sample of comments (*n*=141) totaling 9 132 words, or approximately 13 pages of single-spaced text. From all of the comments gathered from *InHerSight*, approximately 20% were identified as relating to harassment conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized inductive thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012) to explore the sample of web-based comments relating to harassment conflict. Inductive thematic analysis was most suitable for this study as it is appropriate in research where the goal is to explore, describe and analyze new contexts (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Thus, inductive content analysis was most appropriate for the analysis as (1) the context is relatively understudied, (2) the goal of the study was to identify themes as they arise from the content and (3) the application of any comparison or theory occurred as a post-hoc analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

There are several stages of inductive thematic analysis that should be utilized to ensure a 'systematic qualitative analysis with clear procedures for checking the quality of the analysis conducted' (Joffe & Yardley, 2004, p. 57). The first stage of the inductive content analysis required the primary researcher to engage in data reduction or to review the initial sample (*N*=721) to identify the number of comments potentially associated with and pertinent to the research questions (*n*=141). The second stage of the analysis required that the primary research then develop codes from a preliminary review of the reduced sample (*n*=141). From this initial review of the comments, 32 codes were identified as a guide for interpretation. From these descriptive codes, 12 macro-level codes were developed by linking the 32 micro-level codes through descriptive relationships. After the primary researcher developed the macro-

level codes, the secondary researcher reviewed the sample and linked and/or eliminated several codes by redefining or associating identified concepts (Alhojailan, 2012). From this stage of the analysis, 9 clearlydefined themes emerged to create a codebook utilized for further analysis. The themes from this codebook are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF THEMES

Theme	Definition
Assault	A report of sexual or physical violence in the workplace.
Boys' Club	A report of the presence of a 'boys' club' in the workplace.
Issues with Maternity Leave	A report of issues in the workplace related to maternity leave that affect the women's workplace experience.
Lactating Issues	A report of pumping, breastfeeding or lactation issues in the workplace that affected the woman's workplace experience.
Pregnancy Discrimination	A report of issues in the workplace related to pregnancy that affected the woman's workplace experience.
Promotion Discrimination	A report of issues with achieving promotion in the workplace due to gender.
Sexism	A report of women being treated differently than a man in the workplace due to gender.
Sexual Harassment	A report of sexual harassment.
Verbal Harassment	A report of verbal insult, abuse, yelling, threatening, or humiliation.

To apply the codebook to the sample, each comment was treated as a unit. The 9 themes were first successfully applied to a small portion of the sample (*n*=20) of comments by the secondary researcher. The themes, as established in the codebook (see Table 2), were mutually exclusive during this phase of the analysis. Thus, this codebook was applied to the remaining sample (*n*=121) by the secondary researcher. After the secondary researcher analyzed all comments, the data sample was presented to an independent coder. This coder, otherwise blind to the results of the researcher, was trained through a review of the codebook and relevant literature. This coder independently applied the codebook to the entire sample (*n*=141).

Reliability
Inter-coder reliability was tested for the thematic analysis to ensure the themes' interpretation was maintained between coders (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Inter-coder reliability was calculated at 89.3% agreement. Any discrepancies between coders and researchers were discussed until a consensus was reached and 100% inter-coder reliability was achieved. This allowed the researchers to conduct a frequency analysis of the themes.

RESULTS

RQ1: What Communicative Themes Are Evident in Women's Online Commentary About Workplace Harassment Conflict?

There were nine communicative themes evident in women's online commentary about workplace harassment as derived by this study. The inductive thematic schema utilized to categorize and describe the commentary effectively encapsulated the women's self-disclosure of workplace harassment conflict. The 9 content themes derived from the analyzed sample are presented in Table 2.

Frequency Analysis

In terms of online self-disclosure of harassment, the frequency of comments pertaining to a particular theme could indicate a number of potential associated circumstances. However, it is not within the scope of this study to establish cause or correlation for the frequency of the reported themes. Rather, a frequency analysis was conducted to summarize the results of the inductive thematic analysis conducted for this study and to organize the results for both an internal comparison and for comparison to previous literature.

There were 141 instances of some form of a harassment conflict in the 721 of the workplace experience commentary. This is nearly 20% of the women's overall commentary about gender-related issues in the workplace. The three most frequently occurring themes included *sexual harassment* (*n=28*, 20%), *promotion discrimination* (*n=22*, 16%) and *sexism* (*n=21*, 15%). The three least frequently occurring themes included *assault at work* (*n=5*, 4%), *verbal harassment* (*n=8*, 6%) and *pregnancy discrimination* (*n=13*, 9%). The frequency with which each theme appeared is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Theme	Count	Overall Occurrence
Sexual Harassment	28	19.86%
Promotion Discrimination	22	15.60%
Sexism	22	15.60%
Issues with Maternity Leave	15	10.64%
Lactating Issues	14	9.93%
Boys' Club	14	9.93%
Pregnancy Discrimination	13	9.22%
Verbal Harassment	8	5.67%
Assault	5	3.55%
Total	**141**	**100.00%**

Characteristics of the Themes

The way women engaged in commentary and the experiences they disclosed pertaining to each theme can be analyzed to obtain a more grounded understanding of how women describe experiencing workplace harassment conflict. Table 4 provides an overview of the identified themes from the analysis, the message characteristics from each theme, and example commentary pertaining to each theme and characteristic. The following sections provide a description of the frequency of each theme and how each theme relating to workplace harassment was developed in the commentary.

TABLE 4
COMMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND EXAMPLES

Theme	Comment Characteristics	Example Comments
Sexual Harassment	Sexual jokes/ touching Recurrence	I was 'goosed' by [my] male employer and no one in management took the sexual harassment seriously. Sexual harassment was a daily occurrence. You must be understanding of the daily sexual harassment.
Promotion Discrimination	Unequal Representation Hierarchical Advancement	There could be better balance between promotions for men and women. Women, be prepared to be overlooked for promotion. [It is] rare for women to be promoted to management. 90% of the time there is a promotion, it is given to a man.
Sexism	Organizational Culture	Sexism [is] a major problem but they refuse to address it… Constant sexism; poor culture.
	Specific Behaviors	When the company recently announced a Women's Business Resource Group, the male management actually said that they were 'deliberately excluding over half the company'. Chauvinistic to the point of actual sexism.
Childbearing Themes	Lack of Benefits	No paid maternity leave. You cannot even save enough vacation time to cover maternity leave for the first 5 years you are there.
	Penalized for Childbearing	If you are pregnant, they will find out and they will do everything in your life to make your life miserable. Do not attempt to get promoted if you are pregnant. Female managers have to step down if they become pregnant.
Boys' Club	Closed Network Access	Female leadership is grossly lacking, there is a 'good ol' boys club' in management ranks and they circle the wagons any time a female is even considered for a position. '[The company] offers women equal pay for the same job but many jobs are a boys club and you are not taken seriously...'
Verbal Harassment	Specific Words	Dealt with…being called names like b***h and s**t by a co-worker. Women in leadership roles are frequently referred to with derogatory labels… I tried to report another manager who…called me a 'whore' to fellow employees.
	Management as Conflict Source	I had a verbally abusive manager who referred to all female employees as 'bitch'. When I brought it to the attention of higher management, I was let go so as not to 'professionally embarrass' my manager. They put terrible human beings in positions of power who micromanage and verbally abuse you.
Assault at Work	Lack of Managerial Assistance	I was attacked and sexually assaulted while working by another employee. I was told to forget about it. Management will not help you if you are being sexually assaulted by another coworker.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment (*n*=28, 20%) was the most frequently represented theme in women's online commentary about workplace harassment. Sexual harassment conflict often occurred in actions like inappropriate sexual jokes and inappropriate touching. A recurring focus of the commentary regarding how the women experienced sexual harassment conflict centered on its recurrence. Women often suggested that sexual harassment was something that was experienced repeatedly in the same workplace and some comments even suggested that it was something that should be tolerated.

Promotion Discrimination

The second most prevalent theme was promotion discrimination (*n*=22, 16%). Comments pertaining to this theme described work environments where females are underrepresented in management or unlikely to obtain hierarchal advancement. Women commonly suggested that conflict concerning promotion discrimination stemmed from an unequal representation of women in management roles and/or an unequal rate at which women were promoted as compared to men.

Sexism

The third most prevalent theme was *sexism* (*n*=21, 15%). Sexism is an ideology based on the belief that one sex is superior to another. Comments pertaining to *sexism* often referred to the organizational culture and/or the company's working environment as an overarching concept. Despite many comments pertaining to cultural underpinnings of sexism, there were also instances where women identified specific actions that were labeled as sexism in a harassment context.

Childbearing

The fourth most prevalent theme was *issues with maternity leave* (*n*=15, 11%). Collectively with *lactating issues* (*n*=14, 10%) and *pregnancy discrimination* (*n*=13, 9%), childbearing was a consistent harassment conflict source in the women's commentary. Comments pertaining to *issues with maternity leave* often referred to either a lack of payment during the time-off from work due to maternity or lack of maternity leave availability. Further, in regard to *lactating issues* and *pregnancy discrimination*, women often expressed being penalized for pregnancy.

Boys' Club

The sixth most prevalent theme was *boys' club* (*n*=14, 10%). Comments included several phrases like, 'This is an old boys club,' 'Major boys club,' and 'Good ol' boys club.' Upon review of commentary in this theme, the meaning of 'boys' club' has greater clarity. Contextualization of the phrase implied that *boys' club* referred to a team that will accept male membership but, if female, regardless of qualification and skills, joining is not an option. Boys' club reference reflected that women did not feel they were members of the dominant or decision-making group and, even if they were technically declared members, they were not privy to shared community practices.

Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment (*n*=8, 6%) was the eighth most prevalent theme (after pregnancy discrimination (*n*=13, 9%), as aforementioned). The women's commentary often designated specific words women were called in the workplace. Verbal harassment conflict was also often reported as arising from managers.

Assault at Work

While less prevalent than any other theme, several women described experiencing *assault at work* (*n*=5, 4%). Women often described reporting assaults only to be turned away by managers and/or the organization.

RQ2: Do the Communicative Themes Evidenced in Women's Online Commentary About Workplace Harassment Conflict Align with Previously Established Descriptions and Definitions of Harassment?

The nine themes derived from the commentary within the analyzed sample pertain to major areas of study and legal implications in the field of workplace harassment (Bostock & Daley, 2007; Broido, Brown, Stygles & Bronkema, 2015; Holland & Cortina, 2013; Rosenberg, Perlstadt & Phillips, 1993). The literature describes harassment as marked by ongoing, severe, hostile, and unwelcomed action. The women's statements in this study are aligned with these descriptions. Based on findings of this study as compared with previous literature, harassment in the workplace includes unwanted actions or words that result in fear or discomfort as well as actions that exclude individuals from communication and experiences based on gender. Further, the individuals who self-reported harassment conflict in the workplace detail harassment as frequent events that become worse over time which also reflects what is known in the academic literature. The women's commentary reflects U.S. federal agencies' findings that workplace harassment is unwelcome, severe and based on gender. Finally, the women's commentary is aligned with the U.S. Supreme Court descriptions of harassment as intolerable and creating hostile work environments. Table 5 provides an overview of how each theme and the message characteristics from those themes align with previous research.

TABLE 5
COMPARISON TO LITERATURE

Theme	Comment Characteristics	Literature
Sexual Harassment	Sexual jokes/touching	'About one in five Americans reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace, cutting across the population regardless of geographic location, income or political affiliation' (Lee, 2017, para. 1).
		69% of the surveyed women reported experiencing repeated unwanted sexual remarks in the workplace. (Kenny, 2005).
	Recurrence	Targets of workplace harassment likely to endure multiple instances of harassment (McLaughlin, 2018).
		Harassment is often repeated or sustained in the workplace (Johnson, Kirk & Keplinger, 2016).
Promotion Discrimination	Unequal Representation Hierarchical Advancement	43.4% of the top 150 Silicon Valley companies surveyed had no female directors and 40% had just one (Fenwick & West, 2013).
		Women employed in male majority workplaces were more likely to say their gender made it difficult for them to be promoted (Parker, 2018).
		'At the first critical step up to manager, women are 18 percent less likely to be promoted than they male peers,' (McKinsey & Company, 2017, para. 2).
		Nearly 20 percent of all women and 36 percent of women with MBA degrees surveyed felt their gender was a factor in missing a raise or promotion (Miller, 2016).
Sexism	Organizational Culture	Sexism is a form of prejudice coupled with deep ambivalence (Glick & Fiske, 2001).
		43 percent of American women surveyed felt sexism was very common (Statistica, 2018).

Theme	Comment Characteristics	Literature
	Specific Behaviors	Benevolent sexism encompasses subjectively positive attitudes towards women in traditional roles like protective paternalism and idealization of women, while hostile sexism encompasses the negative equivalents like dominance and derogatory beliefs (Glick & Fiske, 1997).
Childbearing Themes	Lack of Benefits	Fill in the blank.
	Penalized for Taking Benefits	The Pregnancy Discrimination Act is an amendment to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and prohibits discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth or related medication conditions (EEOC, 2018b). Women affected by pregnancy or related conditions must be treated in the same manner as other applicants or employees who are similar in their abilities to work (EEOC, 2018b). 'Prior work suggests that employer stereotypes and financial interests leave pregnant women vulnerable to being fired,' (Byron & Roxcigno, 2014, para. 1).
Boys' Club	Closed Network Access	If left out of community information and or community practices, the individuals miss the group's shared history, methods, and behavior patterns (Callahan & Tomaszewski, 2007). Missed access to workplace information and networks can have long-term detrimental career effects (Lang, 2011). The longer one is excluded from informal cultural information, the less likely the individual can assimilate and the more likely they will leave their employment (Huning, Allen & Renn, 2013).
Verbal Harassment	Specific Words/Phrases	77% of women surveyed reported experiencing verbal harassment (GfK KnowledgePanel, 2018). 12.4% of the women surveyed report they experienced verbal abuse or threats in the previous work month (Maestas et. al., 2017) Verbal abuse may be overt (e.g., threatening, yelling, cursing or mocking) or verbal abuse may be covert (e.g., spreading rumors or making jokes) (Holly, 2016).
	Management as Conflict Source	Fill in the blank.
Assault at Work	Lack of Managerial Assistance	Research and literature support that assault at work is a true concern for women (NSCRC, 2013). While it is difficult to gain exact statistics regarding the prevalence of workplace assault as many incidents go unreported (Foster & Fullagar, 2018).

DISCUSSION

In combination with a review of previously established descriptions and definitions of workplace harassment from organizational and official sources in the United States, the current study confirms that functional definitions and descriptions of harassment are applicable in this context. This confirmation provides a necessary bridge between functional definitions and women's workplace harassment conflict. Effectively, the way women reported experiencing enacted harassment conflict and the way it is defined by academic researchers, U.S. federal agencies, and the U.S. Supreme Court have strong associations.

This study assists in explicating the relationship between enacted workplace harassment conflict and foundational definitions of workplace harassment. First, the nine themes developed to encapsulate the women's commentary serve to highlight the recurring sources of workplace harassment conflict in modern organizations which have been clearly defined by U.S. federal agencies and the U.S. Supreme Court. Second, the message characteristics developed to describe the women's commentary serve to highlight recurring qualities of harassment that have been received much attention by academic researchers. Finally, the message examples selected from the sample serve to illustrate how harassment conflict is expressed and experienced at the individual level. Therefore, the findings of this study serve to connect the definitions of harassment (i.e., theme) to harassment qualities defined in academic research (i.e., message characteristics) and women's enacted conflict expression (i.e., example comments). These relationships may be used as foundation for explaining how the previously established definitions and descriptions of workplace harassment connect to women's actual experiences.

Despite the clear relationships between previously researched harassment concepts and the women's commentary, there are several message characteristics that should be discussed. First, it should be noted that that prohibition of harassment was not reflected in the women's commentary from this study in many situations. Women often reported experiencing what they perceived to be harassment conducted through unreportable offenses and otherwise unsupportive but not directly illegal environments. As the purpose of this study is elucidate relationships between functional definitions and enacted workplace harassment, this is an important attribute of the commentary. Specifically, there appears to be a discrepancy between what women continue to perceive as reportable harassment and how reportable harassment is defined.

A significant second tier to employees' experiences of a workplace harassment involved the response of the manager or leader. Indifference or a lack of response will result in the employee perceiving that he or she will not receive support or care from the management team and that an unfair or unkind work environment will be tolerated (Gurchiek, 2018). This is reiterated many times in the women's commentary that points to specific managers who did not assist in resolving harassment conflict and in phrases like "You must be understanding of", "Prepare for" and "Do not attempt to resolve" harassment conflict. Effectively, even when women understood that the harassment conflict that occurred was reportable, they did not perceive it to be something that could be effectively resolved through organizational systems.

CONCLUSIONS

Extensive research has been conducted on each of the themes and characteristics of harassment identified in this study. It was not the purpose of this study to establish new, foundational knowledge about harassment. Rather, establishing the existence of these know qualities of harassment in the women's commentary and explaining how these themes occurred as according to the self-reports serves to connect previous research with enacted workplace harassment conflict expressions. Because varying perspectives on how harassment in the workplace is experienced, described, and defined prevent a clear understanding for employers and employee's harassment in trainings and prevention programs, the study serves to assist in connecting these perspectives.

FUTURE RESEARCH

From a management and human resources perspective, it should first be a focus of ongoing research that women still actively experience various forms of harassment in the contemporary workforce. From a communications and conflict resolution perspective, it should be a focus of ongoing research that women are actively engaging in harassment-related self-reports in online, public forums. The online commentary on harassment conflict may be a medium rich for investigation as it provided a voice to those who have been otherwise marginalized, especially in the workplace.

LIMITATIONS

Data were gathered only from online, web-based texts published during a period in which the commentary was actively being published. The comments are subject to the viewpoint of the individual submitting the information. For future research, face-to-face interviews may offer greater understanding of the employees' lived experience. Additionally, while the focus of this research was harassment conflict, it should be noted that there were three women that self-reported positive work environments. For future research, it would also be interesting to study the characteristics of work environments that support effective male-female employee collaboration. Data in this study was limited to women's commentary as the website from which the sample was gathered was designed a women's community. Further studies on harassment in the workplace concerning men should be a consideration. The data, commentary and definitions in this study were U.S. based. Future research should consider other geographical contexts. Finally, while measures were taken to ensure validity and reliability in the results, the interpretations of the comments were limited to that of the researchers.

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