



Dissolved hierarchical workplace romances : effects of supervisor-subordinate reporting relation, romance type, and source of communication of romance motives on responses to a sexual harassment complaint

by Brandee Jane Broberg

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Applied Psychology

Montana State University

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Abstract:

The effects of characteristics of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance on judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a sexual harassment complaint were examined. The supervisor-subordinate reporting relation (direct vs. indirect), type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian), and source of communication of partners' romance motives (first party vs. third party) were manipulated in vignettes describing a terminated hierarchical workplace romance that resulted in a hostile environment sexual harassment accusation. A sample of 217 employees from three different organizations in the midwest U.S. were used as raters. In support of a legitimization theory, results indicated a difference in raters' judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions for the male accused and female complainant as a function of the supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship and type of workplace romance in which the accused and complainant were previously involved. Implications for workplace romance and sexual harassment research as well as for legitimization theory are discussed.

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APPROVAL

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Brandee Jane Broberg

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

Charles A. Pierce Charles A. Pierce 3/30/01
(Signature) (Date)

Approved for the Department of Psychology

A. Michael Babcock [Signature] 3/30/01
(Signature) (Date)

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Bruce R. McLeod Bruce R. McLeod 4-2-01
(Signature) (Date)

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Date 3/30/01

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ABSTRACT

The effects of characteristics of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance on judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a sexual harassment complaint were examined. The supervisor-subordinate reporting relation (direct vs. indirect), type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian), and source of communication of partners' romance motives (first party vs. third party) were manipulated in vignettes describing a terminated hierarchical workplace romance that resulted in a hostile environment sexual harassment accusation. A sample of 217 employees from three different organizations in the midwest U.S. were used as raters. In support of a legitimization theory, results indicated a difference in raters' judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions for the male accused and female complainant as a function of the supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship and type of workplace romance in which the accused and complainant were previously involved. Implications for workplace romance and sexual harassment research as well as for legitimization theory are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace Romance and Sexual Harassment

Many changes have occurred in the workplace in the past few decades. A combination of the increasing amount of time employees spend at work and the influx of women into the workforce provides a more conducive environment for employees to engage in a workplace romance. A workplace romance is defined as a mutually desired relationship involving physical attraction between two employees of the same organization (Pierce, 1998; Pierce, Byrne, & Aguinis 1996; Quinn, 1977). In addition, work is becoming central to many employees' lives, and organizations are attempting to increase the cooperation and cohesiveness between employees. Such changes occurring in the workplace may provide an explanation for the reported 71% of employees who have either observed or participated in a workplace romance (Dillard & Wittman, 1985), and the fact that 33% of all romantic relationships begin at work with a fellow employee (Bureau of National Affairs, 1998).

Sexual harassment is another pervasive social-sexual phenomenon that can have an impact on organizations and their employees. Sexual harassment is defined by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1993) as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted. The two types of sexual harassment are quid pro quo and hostile environment. Quid pro quo is a more blatant form of sexual harassment, such as sexual coercion or assault, and is not as common as the less blatant form, hostile environment. Hostile environment involves unwanted sexual attention and gender-based harassment (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995; Terpstra & Baker, 1992). The present study focuses only on hostile environment sexual harassment due to the fact that it is more pervasive than

quid pro quo harassment (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991; Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990). In addition, the present study will examine a scenario involving a man harassing a woman because men are more likely to harass and women are more likely to be harassed (Gutek, 1985; USMSPB, 1994).

Link Between Workplace Romance and Sexual Harassment

Researchers believe that there is a link between dissolved workplace romances and sexual harassment (see Pierce & Aguinis, in press). Results from a nationwide survey of human resource professionals indicate that workplace romance and sexual harassment are connected in that harassment complaints many times occur as a result of workplace romances (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 1998). A study conducted by Summers and Myklebust (1992) used vignettes that portrayed a previous workplace romance that was followed by a sexual harassment accusation. Results of Summers and Myklebust's study show that a previous workplace romance results in less favorable responses about a female complainant and more favorable responses regarding a male accused. Judgments of responsibility of the accused and complainant, as well as recommended personnel actions (e.g., ignore issue, written reprimand, suspension, termination), were measured in this study. Results provided evidence that a history of a workplace romance may bias a rater's judgments regarding a sexual harassment accusation. That is, a previous workplace romance may result in subsequent sexually harassing behavior being perceived as more legitimate than if there was no prior history of workplace romance.

More recently, Pierce et al. (2000) found that certain characteristics of a dissolved workplace romance can influence raters' judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions. The characteristics manipulated in Pierce et al.'s study included the

romance motives of the male accused and the female complainant as well as whether the previous workplace romance was between employees with equal versus unequal organizational rank.

Legitimization Theory

Legitimization is one plausible explanation for the influence of a prior workplace romance on decisions regarding a subsequent sexual harassment accusation. Summers and Myklebust (1992) suggested that due to a previous workplace romance between the accused and complainant, raters' may wrongfully legitimize the harassing behavior. This would suggest that a different decision criterion is used when determining what behavior is acceptable when there is a history of a workplace romance. If one legitimizes sexual harassing behavior, they would judge the person who is responsible for the harassing behavior as less responsible and recommend more lenient personnel actions. Pierce et al. (2000) found support for this legitimization theory in that specific characteristics of a workplace romance that previously occurred between the accused and complainant biased raters' responses to a sexual harassment accusation.

It has been proposed that legitimization theory entails a social-cognitive explanation for raters' legitimization of sexually harassing behavior following a terminated workplace romance (Pierce et al., 2000). This proposition asserts that raters have a schema for what they consider to be an appropriate workplace romance. If the dissolved workplace romance is not in accordance with the rater's schema for an appropriate or genuine workplace romance, this would likely affect the evaluation of the sexual harassment accusation. Foley and Powell (1999) suggested that conflicts of interest that result from workplace romances are likely to disrupt the functioning of coworkers because they violate one's sense of justice in the organization. Raters'

judgments and recommended personnel actions are an indicator of how appropriate one perceives characteristics of the prior workplace romance. Therefore, if one perceives a type of workplace romance as negative, the raters' judgments and recommended personnel actions may reflect that perception by being biased toward either the accused or complainant. Currently, we know that characteristics including whether the liaison between the employees was of equal or unequal organizational rank and the level of sincerity of the relational participants romance motives affect the raters' responses (Pierce et al., 2000).

The goal of this research is to provide an experimental test of this recently proposed legitimization theory by examining characteristics of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance that are hypothesized to affect raters' responses to a subsequent sexual harassment complaint. The present study addresses the following research question: What characteristics of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance result in the legitimization of subsequent sexually harassing behavior?

As mentioned earlier, hostile environment sexual harassment is more common than quid pro quo and, therefore, that is the type that will be used in this study. Hierarchical workplace romances will be used in the study due to a number of reasons. First, previous research has indicated that they are more common than workplace romances between employees of equal organizational rank (e.g., Dillard & Witteman, 1985; Dillard, Hale, & Segrin, 1994; Quinn, 1977). Second, the inherent power differential in hierarchical workplace romances may increase the likelihood of sexually harassing behavior between the relational participants (Pierce & Aguinis, in press). The importance of recognizing these factors is evident from previous research finding a link between workplace romance

and sexual harassment. The more information available to organizations on such a topic, the more likely a company will be able to successfully and fairly manage this pervasive phenomenon (Foley & Powell, 1999). In sum, combining all that is known regarding characteristics of a previous workplace romance and their effects on decisions regarding a subsequent sexual harassment accusation, this study will test legitimization theory.

Judgments of Responsibility

Organizations should make informed decisions regarding personnel actions based on an employee's degree of responsibility for the sexually harassing behavior. Therefore, it is imperative to identify what factors influence judgments of responsibility due to the legitimizing of the harassing behavior.

Reporting Relationship

The reporting relationship between the accused and the complainant will likely influence decisions regarding responsibility. Although research suggests that hierarchical workplace romances are perceived more negatively than lateral romances (Pierce et al., 2000), different types of hierarchical relationships have not been examined. As opposed to an indirect (male supervisor-female subordinate in separate departments) workplace romance between a man and a woman, a direct (male supervisor-female subordinate in same department) workplace romance would most likely be perceived more negatively. This negative perception of a direct reporting workplace romance may be a result of a social power differential within the organization, which may promote jealousy and suspicion regarding favoritism in terms of pay, promotions, workloads, and vacation time (Dillard, Hale, & Segrin, 1994; Mainiero, 1986, 1989). In turn, this negative perception

may cause raters to judge the workplace romance participants differently based on the reporting relation between the two employees. Previous research has neglected to address different types of hierarchical workplace romances. The present study will break down hierarchical romances into direct and indirect, based on the reporting relationship between the participants in the liaison. Based on legitimization theory, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 1

Raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as more responsible and a female complainant as less responsible for the harassing behavior when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a direct-reporting workplace romance (male supervisor-female subordinate in same department) as opposed to an indirect-reporting workplace romance (male supervisor-female subordinate in separate departments).

Type of Workplace Romance

Previous research has also suggested that the nature of the workplace romance may have a critical impact on raters' perception of the sexual harassment accusation. Three common motives that coworkers attribute to others' participation in a workplace romance are love, ego, and job-related motives (Dillard, 1987; Quinn, 1977). The love motive refers to searching for a long term companion or spouse. An ego motive refers to searching for excitement, adventure, ego satisfaction, or sexual experience. And the third type of romance motive is referred to as job-related. This refers to searching for advancement, security, power, financial rewards, lighter workloads, and more vacation time (Dillard, 1987; Quinn, 1977). Previous research has found that people perceive a love motive as sincere and genuine, whereas the ego and job-related motives are

perceived as less sincere and genuine (Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989; Dillard et al., 1994). A study conducted by Pierce et al. (2000) found that the accused was judged as most responsible for a sexual harassment accusation when he had an ego motive and the complainant had a love motive. In addition, Pierce et al. (2000) showed that the accused was perceived as least responsible when he had a love motive and the complainant had a job-related motive.

By pairing the accused's and complainant's romance motives, the type of workplace romance they are engaged in can be defined. Three common types of workplace romances have been identified: (a) both employees have a sincere love motive, which is labeled a companionate romance; (b) both employees have an ego motive, which is labeled a fling; and (c) the subordinate has a job-related motive and the supervisor has an ego motive, which is labeled utilitarian (Dillard 1987; Dillard, Hale, & Segrin, 1994; Powell & Foley, 1998; Quinn 1977). Dillard, Hale, and Segrin (1994) examined the frequency of these different types of workplace romances. In this study, participants were asked to describe the types of workplace romances they had observed at their place of employment. The results from this study revealed that approximately one-fourth were classified as companionate, one-fifth were classified as fling, and one-fifth were classified as utilitarian. As mentioned previously, romances that involve a love motive will generally be perceived as more sincere and acceptable than those that do not. The rationale for this idea is that when the accused and complainant are at unequal levels in an organization (male supervisor-female subordinate), suspicions may arise regarding the motives for participating in that romance. In addition, suspicions may arise regarding favoritism due to the social power differential inherent in a hierarchical romance. When workplace romance participants are of equal status in an organization, the likelihood that their motives are insincere may be low due to the fact that supervisors have no effect on one another's organizational benefits. Therefore, a utilitarian workplace romance should

be perceived as the least sincere type of relationship, fling should be perceived as moderately sincere, and companionate should be perceived as the most sincere type of workplace romance. While Pierce et al. (2000) examined only pairings of motives, the present study examines types of romances as defined by different pairings of motives. Based on legitimization theory, the hypotheses regarding the type of workplace romance are related to the genuineness and thus sincerity raters' believe is involved in the romance. The following hypothesis will be tested.

Hypothesis 2

Raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as more responsible and a female complainant as less responsible for the harassing behavior when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a hierarchical (male supervisor-female subordinate) companionate or fling workplace romance as opposed to a utilitarian workplace romance.

Source of Communication of Workplace Romance Motives

A rater's perspective, or thoughts that may influence judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions, may also be dependent upon the source of information regarding the communication of romance motives in the relationship. In terms of an actor-observer divergence, relational participants' actual motives for having a workplace romance can be differentially attributed depending on whether one is a participant in or observer of the liaison (Dillard, 1987). Although participants of a workplace romance are aware of the motive for participating in the relationship, others in the organization may be uncertain about the participants' motives. Dillard (1987) reported that members of an organization are content to gossip about the workplace

romance they are observing rather than convey their opinions or ask questions to the relational participants. Pierce et al. (2000) suggested the importance of examining the communication of the motives for participating in a workplace romance. The impact of third-party information on an organization's environment could be crucial. Third-party perceptions may be inaccurate and less credible compared to first-party perceptions. In other words, the members of an organization may cause others in the organization to perceive a workplace romance differently than the participants of the relationship.

Obviously this could have an impact on judgments of responsibility. Therefore, to gain a more precise understanding of effects of a dissolved workplace romance on responses to a sexual harassment complaint, the source of information regarding the communication of motives for participating in a workplace romance needs to be examined. First-party information, which is information conveyed directly from one of the participants in the workplace romance, may be perceived as more credible than information from a third-party source. Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 3

Raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as more responsible and a female complainant as less responsible when the motives for participating in the hierarchical romance (male supervisor-female subordinate) are conveyed by participants in the workplace romance as opposed to by a third-party source.

Recommended Personnel Actions

The criterion used in many organizations to recommend personnel actions such as reprimands is based on perceived responsibility (Dessler, 2000). Therefore, when an act is perceived as harmful or inappropriate to the organization or members of that

organization, that act is likely to be reprimanded. If an act is perceived as appropriate and helpful to an organization, it is likely to be rewarded.

Organizations use a variety of actions in response to sexual harassment accusations. Organizational actions may vary from ignoring the issue, to giving a written reprimand or more severe actions such as suspension or termination (Foley & Powell, 1999; Mainiero, 1986; Quinn, 1977; SHRM, 1998; Summers & Myklebust, 1992). Summers and Myklebust (1992) exemplified that raters perceive the appropriateness of different personnel actions differently depending on whether the employees under investigation were previously involved with one another in a workplace romance. As with judgments of responsibility, the notion of legitimization process should be evident with respect to recommended personnel actions. Therefore, if a previous workplace romance is perceived as sincere and genuine, the recommended personnel actions may not be as severe. If a previous workplace romance is seen as less sincere and genuine, recommended personnel actions are likely to be more severe (Pierce et al., 2000). With respect to legitimization, it is unknown whether the type of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship (direct vs. indirect), type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian), and source of communication of romance motives (first party vs. third party) will influence raters responses regarding appropriate personnel actions as a result of the sexual harassment accusation. Using the same rationale that was provided for Hypotheses 1-3, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 4

Raters will recommend less lenient personnel actions for a male accused and more lenient personnel actions for a female complainant when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a direct reporting hierarchical workplace romance (male

supervisor-female subordinate in same department) as opposed to an indirect reporting hierarchical workplace romance (male supervisor-female subordinate in separate departments).

Hypothesis 5

Raters will recommend less lenient personnel actions toward a male accused and less lenient personnel actions toward a female complainant when a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance (male supervisor-female subordinate) entailed a utilitarian romance as opposed to a companionate romance or a fling.

Hypothesis 6

Raters will recommend less lenient personnel actions toward a male accused and more lenient personnel actions toward a female complainant when the motives for participating in the hierarchical workplace romance are conveyed by participants in the workplace romance as opposed to by a third-party source.

METHOD

Participants

The study participants consisted of 217 employees from three different organizations in the midwestern U.S. The three organizations and number of participants for each are as follows: a clothing manufacturing company with 100 participants, an international children's aid provider with 91 participants, and an accounting firm with 26 participants. The demographics of the participants are as follows: 33% men and 67% women; 80% whites, 2% Latinos, 9% African Americans, and 1% Native Americans; 28% single, 53% married, and 14% divorced. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 83 years ($M [SD] = 36.8 [11.0]$), tenure in their organization ranged from 1 month to 34 years ($M [SD] = 5.1 [5.3]$), and 95% were employed full time. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) indicated that there were no associations between study participants' organization, sex, ethnicity, employment status, marital status and their judgments of responsibility or recommended personnel actions ($ps > .05$). In addition, study participants' age and tenure in the organization did not correlate with their judgments of responsibility or recommended personnel actions ($ps > .05$).

Design and Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed in person to each employee individually. The three different organizations received the questionnaires on three separate days of the same week. Examples of job titles from the participants include administrative assistant, sales manager, auditor, merchandise planner, partner of accounting firm, chief executive officer, tax specialist, director of training and development, assistant vice president, regional manager, and chief financial officer. The questionnaires were analogous to

those used in the Pierce et al. (2000) study. The questionnaires included (a) a written vignette describing a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance and a subsequent sexual harassment accusation, (b) manipulation check items, (c) measures of the dependent variables, including judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions, and (d) measures of participants' demographics.

Each participant read one vignette that depicted two employees, Keith and Sara, who were romantically involved for three years in either a direct reporting (Keith is Sara's supervisor in same department) or indirect reporting (Keith is a supervisor and Sara is a subordinate, but they work in separate departments) relationship that had recently ended. Keith and Sara's type of workplace romance was defined as either companionate, fling, or utilitarian depending on the pairing of their primary romance motives. The source of information regarding the motives for Keith and Sara's workplace romance was described as either being communicated directly by the relational participants (first party) or through gossip among employees in the organization (third party). The vignette indicated that a few weeks after their romance ended, Sara accused Keith of sexually harassing her at work and reported her complaint to upper-level management. The vignette described Sara's complaint as Keith's persistency in rubbing her neck and shoulders at work and telling her sexual jokes that she found offensive.

In sum, each participant read one of 12 vignettes in a 2 (supervisor-subordinate reporting relation: direct vs. indirect) x 3 (workplace romance type: companionate, fling, or utilitarian) x 2 (source of communication of romance motives: first party vs. third party) between-subjects experiment.

Measures

Manipulation checks

Manipulation check items were used to determine whether the type of reporting relationship, the type of workplace romance, and the source of communication regarding the romance motives were successfully manipulated in the vignettes.

Judgments of responsibility

Participants responded to 18 statements that described potential causes for Sara's sexual harassment complaint. The items used were from Summers (1991, 1996) and Summers and Myklebust (1992). Evidence for the reliability and validity of these items was provided by Pierce et al. (2000). The participant's responses indicated their agreement with the statements (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Of the 18 statements, nine involved judging the accused (e.g., "Keith is responsible for the sexual harassment complaint") and nine involved judging the complainant (e.g., "Sara is responsible for creating the sexual harassment situation"). As expected, a confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 4.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) supported the fit of a two-factor model for the judgement items (Comparative fit index [CFI] = .96, Incremental fit index [IFI] = .96, Normed fit index [NFI] = .94, Relative fit index [RFI] = .93). While a nested one-factor model did provide a reasonable fit (CFI = .94, IFI = .94, NFI = .92, RFI = .90), the two-factor model provided a superior fit ($\Delta\chi^2 [1, N = 217] = 180.60, p < .0001$). Judgment of the accused and judgment of the complainant are the two factors underlying the items. The factor loadings for (a) judgment of the accused items and their respective latent factor ranged from .38 to .81, and (b) judgment of the complainant items and their respective latent factor ranged from

.44 to .81. All loadings for each factor were significant at $p < .001$. And finally, as expected, the two latent factors were specified as and found to be negatively correlated ($r = -.69, p < .001$)

Recommended personnel actions

Participants were also asked to rate how appropriate 12 personnel actions are in response to the sexual harassment accusation (1 = not appropriate, 4 = moderately appropriate, 7 = very appropriate; items taken from Summers, 1991, 1996, and Summers & Myklebust 1992). Evidence for the reliability and validity of these items was provided by Pierce et al. (2000). Of the 12 personnel actions described, three items involved rating the appropriateness of ignoring or dropping the issue. Five items involved rating how appropriate it would be to use disciplinary actions toward the accused (e.g., written reprimand, suspension, transfer, termination). Two items involved rating whether it is appropriate to provide the accused and complainant with social support and sympathy. The last two items involved rating whether it is appropriate for the company to provide counseling for the accused and complainant. As expected, a confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 4.0 supported the fit of a four-factor model for the personnel action items (CFI & IFI = .99, NFI = .98, RFI = .96), whereas a nested one-factor model did not provide an acceptable fit (CFI & IFI = .83, NFI = .81, RFI = .73). The four-factor model provided a superior fit to the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 [6, N = 217] = 611.09, p < .0001$). Ignore/drop issue, discipline, social support and sympathy, and company-funded counseling are the four factors underlying the items. Factor loadings for (a) ignore/drop issue items and their respective latent factor ranged from .57 to .88, (b) discipline items and their respective latent factor ranged from .36 to .89, (c) social support and sympathy items and their respective latent factor ranged from .56 to .99, and (d) company-funded

counseling items and their respective latent factor ranged from .92 to .95. All loadings for each factor were significant at $p < .001$. And finally, in terms of convergent validity, the four latent factors were specified as correlated with one another in the measurement model. For the latent variables, results reveal that (a) a recommended personnel action of social support and sympathy was positively correlated with a recommended personnel action of company-funded counseling ($r = .21, p < .005$), (b) a recommended personnel action of ignore/drop issue was negatively correlated with a recommended personnel action of company-funded counseling ($r = -.23, p < .005$), and (c) a recommended personnel action of social support and sympathy was positively correlated with a recommended personnel action of disciplining the accused ($r = .29, p < .001$).

RESULTS

Correlations Between Study Variables

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for the observed variables including judgment of the accused, judgment of the complainant, and the four recommended personnel actions: ignore/drop issue, discipline, social support and sympathy, and company-funded counseling.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Estimates for Judgments of Responsibility and Recommended Personnel Actions

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Judgments of Responsibility ¹								
1. Accused	4.19	1.07	.84					
2. Complainant	3.78	1.09	-.58**	.88				
Personnel Actions ²								
3. Ignore/Drop issue	1.66	1.11	-.23**	.33**	.80			
4. Discipline	2.42	1.27	.34**	-.16*	.09	.76		
5. Social support & sympathy	2.60	1.60	.09	-.10	.02	.17*	.74	
6. Company-funded counsel.	3.63	2.19	.06	-.16*	-.20*	.13	.26*	.93

Note. N ranged from 212 to 217. Cronbach's alphas appear in bold on the main diagonal. ¹ Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as more responsible for the sexual harassment complaint (1= strongly disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 7= strongly agree). ² Greater scores indicate that the personnel action was considered to be more appropriate (1= not appropriate, 4= moderately appropriate, 7= very appropriate). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Manipulation Checks

The three independent variables were successfully manipulated. Ninety-seven percent of the study participants accurately identified the nature of Keith and Sara's supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship, 94% accurately identified the type of workplace romance in which Keith and Sara were previously involved, and 96% accurately identified the source of communication of Keith's and Sara's workplace romance motives. In addition, 98% correctly identified where Keith and Sara were employed, 94% correctly identified that Keith and Sara had been dating for three years, and 96% correctly identified that the nature of the alleged sexually harassing behavior was both physical and verbal.

Judgments of Responsibility

For judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions, MANOVAs were initially conducted with supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship, type of workplace romance, source of communication of partners' workplace romance motives, rater sex, and rater organization as between-subjects factors. Results revealed a main effect of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship on judgments of the accused and complainant (Wilks's $\lambda = .93$, $F [2, 146] = 5.12$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$), and a main effect of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship on the recommended personnel actions (Wilks's $\lambda = .92$, $F [4, 140] = 3.14$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$). Rater sex and rater organization did not produce any multivariate main or interactive effects and thus I collapsed across these factors in the main analyses. The observed statistical power for the remaining tests of multivariate main and interactive effects was generally less than .60. Considering this

low power and the fact that my hypotheses are conceptually grounded in prior research, I report results of separate ANOVAs instead. For each univariate analysis reported herein, the dependent variable was normally (or approximately normally) distributed and the homogeneity of variance assumption was met.

To test Hypotheses 1-3, two three-way ANOVA's with supervisor-subordinate reporting relation (direct vs. indirect), type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian), and source of communication of romance motives (first party vs. third party) as between-subject factors were conducted. In the first ANOVA, judgment of the accused was the dependent variable, and for the second ANOVA, judgment of the complainant was the dependent variable.

As predicted in Hypothesis 1, there was a main effect of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship on judgment of the accused ($F [1, 205] = 9.24, p < .003, \eta^2 = .04$) and judgment of the complainant ($F [1, 204] = 5.78, p < .02, \eta^2 = .04$). As shown in Table 2, the means indicate that the complainant was judged as less responsible for the harassment when the supervisor-subordinate reporting relation was direct ($M = 3.61$), and more responsible when the reporting relation was indirect ($M = 3.94$). The accused was judged as more responsible for the harassment when the supervisor-subordinate relationship was direct reporting ($M = 4.38$), and less responsible when the reporting relation was indirect ($M = 4.00$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Judgments of Responsibility by Supervisor-Subordinate Reporting Relationship

Judgment	Reporting Relationship			
	Direct		Indirect	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Accused	4.38 ^a	1.10	4.00 ^a	1.01
2. Complainant	3.61 ^b	1.04	3.94 ^b	1.11

Note. *N* ranged from 216 to 217. Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as more responsible for the sexual harassment complaint. ^a Main effect of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship, $p < .003$. ^b Main effect of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship, $p < .02$.

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, there was a main effect of type of workplace romance on raters' judgment of the complainant ($F [2, 204] = 3.24, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$). As Table 3 indicates, the means are in the direction predicted, with the complainant judged as less responsible for the harassment when she was previously involved in a companionate workplace romance ($M = 3.66$) or fling ($M = 3.62$) as opposed to a utilitarian workplace romance ($M = 4.06$). Tukey's HSD tests reveal that for raters' judgment of the complainant, both a companionate romance and a fling differed from a utilitarian romance ($ps < .05$). The other part of Hypothesis 2 was not supported in that the main effect of type of workplace romance on raters' judgment of the accused was nonsignificant. The means were, however, in the predicted direction with the accused judged as more responsible for the sexual harassment accusation when he was previously involved in a companionate workplace romance ($M = 4.25$) or a fling ($M = 4.25$) as opposed to a utilitarian workplace romance ($M = 4.06$). In sum, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Judgments of Responsibility by Type of Workplace Romance

Judgment	Romance Type					
	Companionate		Fling		Utilitarian	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Accused	4.25	1.20	4.25	1.04	4.06	1.00
2. Complainant	3.66*	1.19	3.62*	1.03	4.06*	1.02

Note. N ranged from 216 to 217. Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as more responsible for the sexual harassment complaint. * Main effect of type of workplace romance, $p < .04$.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported. There was not a main effect of source of communication of the partners' workplace romance motives on raters' judgment of the accused or judgment of the complainant ($ps > .05$).

Recommended Personnel Actions

To test Hypotheses 4-6, four three-way ANOVA's were conducted with supervisor-subordinate reporting relation, workplace romance type, and source of communication of romance motives as between-subject factors. The dependent variables were the following four recommended personnel actions: ignore/drop the issue, discipline, social support and sympathy, and company-funded counseling.

As predicted in Hypothesis 4, there was a marginally significant main effect of supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship on the personnel action of discipline ($F [1, 202] = 3.00, p < .08, \eta^2 = .02$) and the personnel action of company-funded counseling (F

[1, 201] = 3.23, $p < .07$, $\eta^2 = .02$). As indicated in Table 4, the means reveal that results are in the direction predicted. Raters declared it as more appropriate to discipline the accused when the accused and complainant were involved in a direct-reporting relationship ($M = 2.55$) as opposed to an indirect-reporting relationship ($M = 2.29$). Raters also declared that it was less appropriate to provide company-funded counseling to the accused and complainant when they were involved in a direct-reporting relationship ($M = 3.42$) as opposed to an indirect-reporting relationship ($M = 3.84$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Recommended Personnel Actions by Supervisor-Subordinate Reporting Relationship

Personnel Action	Reporting Relationship			
	Direct		Indirect	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Ignore/Drop issue	1.57	1.00	1.76	1.20
2. Discipline	2.55	1.27	2.29	1.27
3. Social Support	2.72	1.55	2.50	1.65
4. Counseling	3.42	2.15	3.84	2.22

Note. N ranged from 212 to 214. Greater scores indicate that the personnel action was considered to be more appropriate.

As predicted in Hypothesis 5, there was a main effect of type of workplace romance on the recommended personnel action of discipline ($F [2, 202] = 3.34$, $p < .04$, $\eta^2 = .03$) and the recommended personnel action of company-funded counseling ($F [2,$

201] = 3.04, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). As shown in Table 5, the means are in the direction predicted as well. Raters revealed that it was more appropriate to discipline the male accused when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a utilitarian workplace romance ($M = 2.62$) as opposed to a companionate workplace romance ($M = 2.09$) or fling ($M = 2.49$). Tukey's HSD tests reveal that for disciplining the accused, a utilitarian romance differed significantly only from a companionate romance ($p < .04$). Raters also indicated that it was less appropriate to provide company-funded counseling when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a utilitarian workplace romance ($M = 3.18$) as opposed to a companionate workplace romance ($M = 3.74$) or fling ($M = 3.99$). Tukey's HSD test reveal that for providing company-funded counseling, a utilitarian romance differed significantly only from a fling ($p < .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was partially supported.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for Recommended Personnel Actions by Type of Workplace Romance.

Judgment	Romance Type					
	Companionate		Fling		Utilitarian	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Ignore/Drop issue	1.56	1.07	1.66	1.24	1.75	1.01
2. Discipline	2.09 ^a	1.16	2.49 ^a	1.27	2.62 ^a	1.33
3. Social Support	2.38	1.62	2.88	1.63	2.53	1.53
4. Counseling	3.74 ^b	2.37	3.99 ^b	2.23	3.18 ^b	1.93

Note. N ranged from 212 to 214. Greater scores indicate that a personnel action was considered to be more appropriate. ^a Main effect of type of workplace romance, $p < .04$.

^b Main effect of type of workplace romance, $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 6 was not supported. There was no main effect of source of communication of partners' workplace romance motives on any of the recommended personnel actions ($p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was to contribute to the existing workplace romance and sexual harassment literature regarding legitimization theory. This was done by addressing the following research question: What characteristics of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance result in the legitimization of subsequent sexually harassing behavior? Previous research suggests that characteristics of a dissolved workplace romance effect judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions of a subsequent sexual harassment accusation (Pierce et al., 2000). The current research entails three additional factors that have not yet been examined: the reporting relation between the supervisor and subordinate, the type of workplace romance based on pairings of romance motives, and the source of communication of the romance motives. The additional factors used in the study were intended to increase the realism of an organizational setting, by including factors that have been excluded in previous research. The increased cohesiveness in organizations today may be more conducive to social interaction between employees, including hierarchical romances and gossip regarding romance motives (Dillard, 1987).

Judgments of Responsibility

Hypothesis 1

With respect to judgments of responsibility, support exists for Hypothesis 1, which predicted that judgments of the accused and judgments of the complainant would be influenced by the supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship. When the accused and complainant were involved in a direct reporting relationship raters reported that the accused was more responsible and the complainant less responsible. When the accused

and complainant were involved in an indirect reporting relationship, the accused was not perceived as responsible as when they were in a direct reporting relationship. Again, this is perhaps due to the raters' schemas for what constitutes an appropriate workplace romance. A direct-reporting relationship involves a power differential, which leaves the possibility of unfair treatment of employees. Therefore, such a relationship is perhaps perceived as inappropriate by the rater. However, with an indirect-reporting relationship, which lacks the power differential, raters seem to legitimize the harassing behavior perhaps because of their schema for an appropriate workplace romance.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2, which predicted that the type of workplace romance has an effect on judgments of the accused and judgments of the complainant, was partially supported. More specifically, the complainant was perceived as less responsible when she was involved in a companionate workplace romance as opposed to a fling or a utilitarian workplace romance. Again, this may be due to the idea that a companionate workplace romance is typically perceived as more genuine than a fling or utilitarian romance, and therefore the harassing behavior is perceived as legitimate by raters.

Hypothesis 3

Support was not provided for Hypothesis 3, which predicted that the source of communication of the workplace romance motives would influence raters' judgments of the accused and judgment of the complainant. The lack of support for Hypothesis 3 may be due to the inherent lack of realism that is evident with the use of written vignettes. Although the message was successfully manipulated, only very salient and relevant messages may be taken into consideration when filling out the questionnaire. The source

of communication may not have seemed to be an important piece of information to the raters' while making decisions regarding the sexual harassment complaint. Perhaps it is merely the motives that matter and not necessarily who communicates the motives.

Recommended Personnel Actions

Hypothesis 4

With respect to recommended personnel actions, results provided partial support for Hypothesis 4, which stated that the accused's and complainant's supervisor-subordinate reporting relationship influences raters' recommended personnel actions. The type of reporting relationship influenced two of the four recommended personnel actions, including disciplining the accused and providing the accused with company-funded counseling. More specifically, raters believed it was more appropriate to discipline the accused when the workplace romance involved a direct reporting relationship. Raters' also believed it was less appropriate to provide the accused with company-funded counseling when it was a direct reporting relationship. The direct reporting relationship is perhaps perceived negatively by the raters' as explained by legitimization theory and our schemas for an appropriate workplace romance. Therefore, the recommended personnel action of disciplining the accused in that type of reporting relationship is expected. Company-funded counseling is most likely perceived as something the company can do to help an employee. Therefore, if the raters' believed that the accused in a direct reporting relationship is at fault, they would not recommend company-funded counseling. Again, due to legitimization, it is not surprising that more lenient personnel actions were perceived as appropriate when the workplace romance involved an indirect reporting liaison.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5, which predicted that the type of workplace romance would influence raters' recommended personnel actions of the accused and complainant, was partially supported. Again, the recommendation of two of the four personnel actions were influenced by the type of workplace romance: disciplining the accused and providing company-funded counseling for both the accused and the complainant. When the accused and complainant were involved in a utilitarian workplace romance as opposed to a companionate romance or a fling, raters' did not believe company-funded counseling was appropriate. This can be explained by the fact that utilitarian workplace romances are perceived more negatively, and therefore the sexually harassing behavior is not seen as legitimate as it is with other types of workplace romances.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 was not supported, which predicted that the source of communication of workplace romance motives would influence raters' recommended personnel actions of the accused and complainant. As mentioned earlier, this may be due to raters' not seeing an importance in who communicated the motives as opposed to the importance in the motives themselves.

Summary of Results

In sum, this study provides additional information to the existing literature that supports legitimization theory. The legitimization theory proposed by Pierce et al. (2000) suggests that if the raters' schema for an appropriate workplace romance is not in accordance with the dissolved romantic relationship they are investigating, this will affect

the evaluation of the sexual harassment accusation. This study indicates that the type of reporting relationship between the accused and the complainant, as well as the type of workplace romance in which they were previously involved, influences raters' judgments of responsibility. In addition, this study indicates that the type of reporting relationship between the accused and complainant as well as the type of workplace romance they were previously involved influences raters' recommendations of appropriate personnel actions. And lastly, this study revealed that the source of communication of romance motives did not have an impact on raters' judgments of responsibility or their recommended personnel actions.

As indicated by the results, it may be that raters' do not consider a direct reporting relationship as appropriate as an indirect reporting relationship. This is not surprising, considering that past research has provided evidence that raters' perceive lateral workplace romances as more appropriate than hierarchical workplace romances (e.g., Dillard et al., 1994; Mainiero, 1986, 1989). It also seems that raters' perceive utilitarian workplace romances as less appropriate than companionate or fling romances. This perception is consistent with prior research which has shown that ego or job-related motives are viewed as less genuine than a love motive (Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989; Dillard et al., 1994). These factors may be more salient to raters' than the source of communication of the romance motives and that may be the reasoning behind the absence of an effect for source of communication.

Implications for Training and Development

Results from the Society for Human Resource Management's 1998 survey exemplify that sexual harassment occurs in organizations as a direct result of workplace romances. If organizations are attempting to implement policies regarding different types

of workplace romances (e.g., direct-reporting vs. indirect-reporting relationships), the consequences of different characteristics of workplace romances need to be determined. Training and development programs need to recognize that without the proper information, sexually harassing behavior that occurs between previously romantically involved employees may be wrongfully legitimized. This could negatively impact other aspects of the organization. For instance, an employee who harasses their previous workplace romance partner may not receive proper punishment. This can effect other members of the organization by sending the message that sexually harassing behavior does not lead to severe consequences.

Directions for Future Research

Because hostile environment sexual harassment is more pervasive than quid pro quo, it was examined in this study. However, it is important to address all types of sexual harassment that may occur in an organization. It also would be important to examine other types of workplace romances that may include same-sex romances as opposed to opposite-sex romances. Extramarital liaisons may also cause different reactions than nonextramarital liaisons and therefore, this should to be examined in the future as well.

Although prior research has examined rater characteristics such as gender (Summers & Myklebust, 1992; Pierce et al., 2000), additional characteristics of the rater should be assessed in future studies. For instance, if a rater has previously been involved in a workplace romance, they may have different perceptions than those who have not been involved in one.

A better understanding of the impact of a dissolved workplace romance on a subsequent sexual harassment accusation would be helpful to organizations. Therefore, any additional factors that may play a role in the decisions made by organizations need to

be examined.

Potential Study Limitations

The first potential limitation to the present study is the use of vignettes. Although the participants clearly identified the relevant information in the manipulation checks, it may not have been nearly as realistic as a true workplace romance and sexual harassment accusation. Due to ethical boundaries, many researchers have used vignettes in the past (Murphy, Herr, Lockhart, & Maguire, 1986). Using a video method in the future may make the scenario more realistic.

With respect to generalizability of the present results, it should be noted that I only assessed the most pervasive patterns of organizational behavior. There are obviously other instances involving other behaviors that need to be assessed as well. For instance, quid pro quo sexual harassment, although not as pervasive as hostile environment sexual harassment, is still an existing form of harassment that needs to be examined. Another possible situation that was not assessed in the present study is workplace romances between female supervisors and male subordinates.

Another potential study limitation is that the present study used self-reported measures based on raters' opinions. Although the questionnaires were completely confidential and anonymous, participants may have been hesitant to report their true opinions. The questionnaire was completed in the organizations, which may have caused some employees to be reluctant to be honest due to the nature of the environment.

Concluding Remarks

Workplace romances and sexually harassing behavior are pervasive social sexual phenomena that may be related to one another. With the past research on the link

between workplace romance and sexual harassment, a legitimization theory has been posited. This theory asserts that investigators of sexual harassment complaints have schemas for what constitutes an appropriate workplace romance. Therefore, when they observe a terminated workplace romance followed by a sexual harassment accusation, they may consider characteristics of the previous workplace romance and make decisions based on their workplace romance schemas.

If employees have workplace romance schemas that dictate what is perceived as appropriate or not, managers in organizations need to be aware of the possibility that those individuals investigating hostile environment sexual harassment accusations may wrongfully legitimize the harassing behavior due to the presence or absence of specific characteristics of the previously dissolved workplace romance. Not only did the present study extend the workplace romance literature by assessing additional characteristics of a dissolved workplace romance, it also tested the legitimization theory posited by Pierce et al. (2000). Overall, the present study provides support for legitimization theory. Results suggest that characteristics of a dissolved workplace romance can bias raters' decisions regarding an ensuing hostile environment sexual harassment accusation.

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