“She’s So Beautiful, She Could Get Away with Murder”: A Look at the Relationship Between Sexual Transgression & Attractiveness

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I would like to thank...

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................. 4  
Introduction ........................................................................................................ 5 
Attractiveness ...................................................................................................... 7  
  Sexual Transgression and Attractiveness .......................................................... 10  
Defendant Attraction-Leniency Effects ................................................................. 12  
Attractiveness and Punishment of Sexual Transgressions ................................... 16  
Method .................................................................................................................. 19  
  Participants ........................................................................................................ 19  
  Materials ............................................................................................................ 20  
  Procedure ........................................................................................................... 21  
Results ................................................................................................................... 22  
Discussion ............................................................................................................ 25  
About the Author ................................................................................................. 31  
References ............................................................................................................ 32  
Appendices .......................................................................................................... 38  
  A: Informed Consent ......................................................................................... 38  
  B: Stimulus Material and Manipulation Check .................................................. 39  
  C: Attractiveness Manipulations ..................................................................... 42  
  D: Dependent Measures ................................................................................... 43  
  E: Debriefing ................................................................................................... 45
“She’s So Beautiful, She Could Get Away with Murder”:
A Look at the Relationship Between Sexual Transgression & Attractiveness

Abstract

The Attraction-Leniency Effect theorizes attractive people are treated with more lenience in punishment than their average-looking or unattractive counterparts. The current research addresses the relationship between sexual harassment and how the perception of a particular sexual harassment account changes in light of the facial attractiveness of the plaintiff involved in the claim. Participants were assigned to a Mock Grievance Review Panel, read statements regarding possible sexual harassment and then rated the believability, perception of fault, and the severity of punitive actions that should be taken for the faulted party in the scenario. Participants rated an attractive plaintiff as more believable than a plaintiff with no picture. The participants assigned more severe punishment to the defendant in the attractive condition than in the no picture or unattractive condition. Other research hypotheses were not fully supported by this research and the implications of these results are discussed.
“She’s So Beautiful, She Could Get Away with Murder”:

A Look at the Relationship Between Sexual Transgression & Attractiveness

It’s ten o’clock in the morning on a fine spring day in May. The birds are singing, the flowers are in full bloom, and this early in the year the sun only warms, never burns. It would take horrendous news or circumstance to be grumpy on a day like today, something like jury duty.

At the Cook County courthouse John Smith is reporting for day eight of jury duty. For once in his life, he’d actually rather be at work.

“John Smith?” calls the bailiff.

“Here,” he says. “That’s me,” he thinks, “Jury duty. Accepted as Juror #3. Feel my joy. I’m here because there’s some guy dude who’s been accused of raping some chick. Whatever. The details are kinda sketchy so far, we haven’t heard the prosecuting, it’s hard to say.”

He fiddles with his tie as he files into the courtroom. Today the plaintiff in the case will be testifying.

“Wow! Is that her?” he think, “It’s gotta be, she’s sitting down on the plaintiff’s side. Man is she ugly! A total howler. Roofies? The man must have been the one drugged if have thought that looked like a good idea!”

Members of juries in our legal system are fallible human beings. They do not always rely on the evidence presented to make a judgment but may rely on other factors. Thus, in courtrooms, jurors make decisions or judgments based on little evidence. Without using evidence, they are most likely relying on their gut feeling about a situation or a person. The hypothetical scenario described above represents a situation where these feelings influenced a juror. Factors not relevant to the situation profoundly influenced verdict. A person may not be fully aware of these influences, but they can still lead them to making inferences. Judges instruct jurors to remain objective during a trial and to ignore extralegal factors such as appearance, emotional pleas, and race.

Human inference is a flawed process. The same factors that affected the legal case above also influence decision in extralegal and quasi-legal situations such as during the hiring of an employee or the review of an employee’s performance (Morrow, McElroy, Stamper, & Wilson,
A consistent finding in almost all of these situations is that physical attractiveness benefits the physically attractive person (Castellow, Wuensch, & Moore, 1990; Darby & Jeffers, 1988; Downs & Lyons, 1991; Efran, 1974; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992; Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988; Langlois et al, 2000; Mazella & Feingold, 1994; Morrow, McElroy, Stamper, & Wilson, 1990; Solomon & Schopler, 1978; Stewart, 1980, 1984; Thornto, 1977). When attractiveness indirectly reduces the amount of punishment an offender receives, this is referred to as the Attraction-Leniency Effect (ALE).

The effect of attractiveness takes place during information processing in the form of heuristics and schemas. Heuristics are cognitive shortcuts that help us make quick judgments about our surroundings or people. These heuristics help reduce the amount of thinking that is necessary to make a decision about how to react to incoming stimuli. For example, when approaching a door, we use the "how a door functions" heuristic to make decisions about how to open that door: chances are manipulation of a handle will pull or push the door open, and in effect the door will swing on the hinges allowing for passage. By using this heuristic, it is not necessary to relearn how to a door functions every time we must open a door, we can use the heuristic as a cognitive shortcut, save cognitive energy, and divert that energy into a different task. This prevents cognitive and stimulus overload. However, heuristics can become problematic when they influence active thought process of evaluation because stereotypes will tend to influence perception. Heuristics, stereotypes, can lead people to infer things about an individual without any other evidence than the association, which is usually played out under the guise of "gut feeling" or "intuition."

African-Americans have been victims of this processing error in the United States. There is an illusory correlation between their presence in society and crime; many sociologists would
agree the crime is usually a result of extreme poverty and little other options for advancement. The introduction of images such as the "Gansta" or "Thug," which glorify gang-organized crime and hypersexual stereotypes, have not helped. These images influence perceptions of the African-American community especially when people have little interaction with actual people to counteract these stereotypes. The problem with using an availability heuristic to perceive race was evident in the "white flight" witnessed in Matteson, Illinois (Brokaw, 1997). Many white residents of the town perceived the crime rate to be escalating and the quality of the schools declining as more African-American families moved into the town. However, statistical tracking showed no change in either of these areas during the past five years. While these problems with over-generalized racial stereotypes are concerning, these will not be the focus of the breadth of the paper. The current research will focus on the way a person's, specifically a woman's, attractiveness works for or against them in a case of sexual transgression.

Attractiveness

The dynamic of a physical attractiveness schema in social interactions and evaluations is a complex one. Personal experience constantly molds and changes perception and the environment is filled with cues about how we should perceive or not perceive something. Visual cues provide a quick processing route to stored memory. Visual cues can save the problem of interacting in a potential dangerous situation, or even with a person we don't like, in order to make a judgment about the environment. It is not hard to see why physical appearance has become important to our species sustaining social interactions. One perspective claims that the human pre-occupation with physical attractiveness and beauty is a learned, cultural behavior; Etcoff (1999), however, argues that the pre-occupation is not learned, but a Darwinian, survival mechanism seen in almost every civilization. Beauty is not "in the eye of the beholder;"
agreement of attractiveness exists within cultures and qualities of physical attractiveness agree from cross-ethnic and cross-cultural perspectives (Langlois et al, 2000). Physical beauty is a signal to others in a social group of good physical health, proper nutrition, and receptiveness to mating (Barber, 1995; Gangestad & Buss, 1993; Gangestad & Thornhill, 1998; Langlois et al, 2000). A meta-analysis (Langlois et al, 2000) supported fitness-related theories of attractiveness, specifically the theories of good genes, human mate selection, and differential parental solicitude. After all, attractiveness is a morphological characteristic, and a phenotypic indicator of health, fitness, quality, and reproductive value. All of this helps explain why beauty is an important thing to actively and passively perceive, and why there exists an association between attractiveness and positive traits (Jacobson & Koch, 1978; Langlois & Styczynski, 1979).

Taking into account the earlier discussion on heuristics, schemas/Schematic theory, and illusory-correlation, the next logical step in explaining how attractiveness affects perception is Implicit Personality Theory. Implicit Personality Theory is similar in nature to an illusory-correlation, but it is specific in that it explains the perceived relationship between a person’s appearance and their expected character traits. That is, heuristics imply sets of personality traits on people based on arbitrary criteria. The following studies demonstrate how Implicit Personality Theory manifests when attractiveness is manipulated and show evidence of a very sticky nature versus nurture argument for attractiveness.

Langlois (et al 2000) conducted a meta-analysis of studies looking at how attractiveness affects perception and behavior. Their findings lend support to Implicit Personality Theory. Children and adults evaluate attractive people more favorably; even if the evaluation is against people they are familiar with. Attractive adults have more occupational competence, more social appeal, more interpersonally competence, and are better adjusted. Attractiveness is as important
in school and work as in social domains. Attractive adults and children are treated more favorably, and they are treated significantly better than unattractive people. Attractive children and adults actually behave better; they have more positive behavior and possess more positive traits. Attractive adults have more occupational success, better health, and better social skills, slightly better mental health, and are slightly more intelligent. This pattern is very important to schema theory. The more available information reinforces a heuristic, the more that heuristic is thought to be accurate, and the more the heuristic will be relied on to make a decision where critical thinking, analysis of explicit information, is crucial. Attractiveness, surprisingly, is as important for men as well as for women. Similar findings were supported in an earlier meta-analysis (Feingold, 1992; Mazella & Feingold, 1994).

Implicit Personality Theory tries to explain how people use schemas and heuristics to make decisions about how they perceive people. Implicit Personality Theory is similar to Schematic Theory; it theorizes personality traits are implied in people as the result of things other than the actual observance of the trait. Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, and Longo (1991) performed meta-analysis on attractiveness studies, and Implicit Personality Theory best explained the results. They used Implicit Personality Theory to explain the expected association between physical appearance and personality traits seen in the studies they analyzed. In other words, physical appearance is so strongly correlated with expected behavior that it affects how people perceive behavior. The beauty-is-good/attractive-is-good effect was moderate in the analysis. Attractiveness was most associated with social competence, moderately associated with potency, adjustment, and intellectual competence. The high association with social competence may explain the reverse ALE in legal cases where attractiveness assists the
completion of a crime: beautiful people are supposed to implicitly be socially competent; failure to produce this behavior violates a stereotypical norm.

However, attractiveness is not always an advantage in real life. When seeking employment or a career promotion, attractiveness is a benefit to men but a disadvantage to women (Farley, Chia, & Allred, 1998; Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979). Attractiveness is especially disadvantageous for a woman when she seeks employment in a managerial position (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979).

**Sexual Transgression & Attractiveness**

A transgression is a “violation of a law, command, or duty” (Merriam-Webster, 2005). A sexual transgression is by deduction a “violation of sexual law, sexual command, or sexual duty.” Sexual harassment, adultery, molestation, pedophilia, sexual assault, all these fall in the spectrum of actions one could consider a sexual transgression, defined within our cultural norms. U.S. laws have defined sexual transgression by making the aforementioned actions criminal offenses. Specifically for the purposes of this study, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)\(^1\) defines sexual harassment as

> “A form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.”

The media often highlights cases of sexual transgression. For example, in the summer of 2004, a young woman came forward accusing celebrity basketball player Kobe Bryant of sexual assault.

The public's reaction to this case interested me, so I was interested in how they were reacting to the media coverage. My personal account went something like this:

The media frenzy anticipating the trial is relentless. I try to avoid spectacle headlines as much as the next person, after all, I stopped watching TV ages ago, but I give into clicking a link to a recent news article online. I already know most of the facts, or at least the facts as the media presented them, regarding the case. Yet I give into the urge anyways. The first thing I look for after clicking on the link is a picture of her face. Does this woman look guilty? Does she look capable of lying to the police? Or does she look innocent, a woman who wouldn't lie to save herself? Furthermore, why do I think looking at a picture of her can help me detect all this better than the facts can?

This personal reaction was interesting, and it was common sense to think others might feel the same way: they had to see a picture of this woman before they felt they could make a judgment about her. However, why did we think looking at a picture of someone could help us decide such things? On some level, it is because we can accurately perceive positive social traits by evaluating facial attractiveness. The heuristic of facial attractiveness has associations of career success, popularity, and social competence, and, strangely enough, research supports that these traits occur significantly more in people with attractive faces (Langlois et al, 2000). True, the validity of such studies is up for debate as studies that find no significance are rarely published, but there is no way to fully prove or disprove this capacity.

A plethora of studies have examined how a defendant's attractiveness affects the sentence or punishment they received (Efran, 1974; Solomon & Schopler, 1978; Storck & Sigall, 1979; Stewart, 1980, 1984; Darby & Jeffers, 1988; Downs & Lyons, 1991; McKelvie & Coley, 1993; Wuensch & Moore, 2004). Other studies, although not as many, have looked at the effect a
victim's attractiveness has on a case (Thorton, 1977; Kanekar, Nazareth, 1988; Wuensch & Moore, 2004). Only relatively few projects have examined the effect a victim's attractiveness has on a case involving sexual transgression, but even in samples as young as elementary students, attractiveness has the potential to affect likeability and perceived competence (Cole, 1993).

**Defendant Attraction-Leniency Effects**

The research presented in this section created the empirical support necessary to form the theory of an Attraction-Leniency Effect. Perhaps provoked in part by reaction to the Civil Rights movement and a desire to ascertain equality in all areas of regulated American life, most of the research on this topic was conducted in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s. The Attraction-Leniency Effect (ALE), as the title suggests, supports the correlation that the more attractive a person is, the more lenient treatment they will be privileged to, and the role this effect may have in legal and quasi-legal scenarios is disconcerting.

Efran (1974) conducted one of the first controlled research experiments on the extralegal factors, previously, most research on the topic had been anecdotal. Some controlled research that had been done showed character traits and attitudinal similarity affects likeability which effect verdicts and sentencing. However, he was unable to find much research on attractiveness as an extralegal factor and decided to look at the topic in-depth. Participants simulated a jury procedure in which they were presented with a case summary and a photograph of the defendant; physical attractiveness was manipulated (attractive and unattractive conditions). They were asked to rate the defendant on certainty of guilt, recommended punishment severity, and on how attractive they found the defendant. Efran found attractiveness reduces the certainty of guilt,
Sexual Transgression & Attractiveness

reduces the severity of punishment, and increases attraction (obvious measure, taken to make sure the participants perceived the defendant to be attractive).

Solomon and Schopler (1978) looked at physical attractiveness and how it interacts with sentencing in criminal situations where attractiveness should not be part of the crime (shouldn’t have provoked or whatever). Unattractive female defendants were given longer sentences than the attractive female defendants. All participants for this experiment were male and acted as jurors in the case.

Taking the relation a step further and complicating the scenario, Storck and Sigall (1979) suggested a relationship between a “harm-doer’s” attractiveness and the victim’s history of prior victimization. Attractive “harm-doer’s” were punished less when the victim had a history of victimization, but unattractive “harm-doer’s” were punished less when the victim had no history of victimization. However, in this experiment, there is no question as to whether the “harm-doer” is guilty as the participants watch him or her cheat the victim out of money and then chooses a punishment for him or her. This might cause the participants to rely less on attractiveness as a deciding factor for punishment since there is no question that the defendant is guilty of their actions. However, a criminal case of cheating someone one of money has various and perhaps significant differences than a case involving sexual assault, molestation, or harassment.

By 1980, Stewart observed one area where the theory’s empirical support was seriously lacking: external validity. To provide further support for ALE, the theory was taken to the local courts where fieldwork could be conducted. Up until Stewart’s research, research in ALE had been conducted primarily in experimental settings. He recruited research assistants to sit in on criminal cases in county court and complete standard forms rating the defendant’s attractiveness,
amounting to observations on 74 defendants (1980). The utilization of a field study could examine if these same effects existed in actual criminal cases. Sentencing information for each of the cases was obtained afterward. He found more attractive defendants tend to have lighter sentences, as the previous research has suggested. He also found crime seriousness has a negative correlation with attractiveness, and that nonwhite defendants were punished more.

Upon further analysis, however, it was found that the race confounded with the seriousness of the crime and thus did not have a significant effect on its own. That is, nonwhite defendants were more likely to be on trial for serious crimes such as murder, assault, or rape than white defendants, creating what appeared to be a racial-preference variation of ALE, but race confounded with crime seriousness, and, after examining the relationship statistically, race by itself did not produce a significant effect on sentencing or convictions. This effect of crime seriousness negating the effect of attraction-leniency was also supported by previous research (Sigall & Ostrove, 1975).

He further examined this area with the follow-up of a similar 1984 study. Improved methods included having two observers observe each defendant to increase interrater reliability, keeping observers blind to the purpose of the experiment so no single item would take precedence on the rating sheet, and the attractiveness rating was expanded to bipolar items: dirty-clean, well dressed-poorly dressed, sloppy-neat, and attractive-unattractive. All ratings expressed the hypothesized correlation to punitiveness before and after seriousness of crime was controlled. Additionally, good posture-poor posture, originally intended as a filler item, affected punishment.

Darby and Jeffers (1988) acknowledged what they believed to be a deficit in this area of research, "most studies [on attractiveness] involve decisions made by mock jurors without
consideration of the possible role played by jurors’ self-perceptions, and no research exists on the influence of juror’s self-perceptions of attractiveness on their judicial actions.” The research found a significant interaction between the tested variables and the participant’s self-perception of attractiveness. These findings can be explained in terms of leniency effects when judging other with similar attributes.

Subjects rated their own attractiveness, and then evaluated attractive, average, or unattractive defendants on guilt, responsibility of charges, trustworthiness, happiness, honesty, intelligence, and likeability. They then recommended punishment. The crimes in the scenario were misdemeanor or less, and sought to maximize the similarity effect by using ambiguously written, plausible college-life scenarios. Attractive defendants were punished less severely, rated as less responsible for charges, happy, likeable, and trustworthy. Leniency effects were present when participants judged defendants with similar attributes to themselves. Attractive participants were more likely to convict unattractive and recommended the harshest punishment. Unattractive participants were harshest on moderately attractive defendants, possibly because they were simultaneously influenced by the ALE and similarity leniency effect. Attractive and less attractive participants recommended the least severe punishment for attractive defendants.

Downs and Lyons (1991) wanted to see if same attractiveness-leniency bias existed in judges since a judge and not a jury decide most cases. They did natural observations on 915 female and 1,320 male defendants in misdemeanor and felony cases during bail or fine settings by a judge. During these plea-bargaining or bail setting, the defendants do not have a chance to clean up their appearance before appearing before a judge. Results showed that even judges are susceptible to the Attraction-Leniency Effect. Litigants rated a 1 or 2 (unattractive) on a scale of
1 to 5 received higher bail/fine settings than litigants rated a 3 (moderately attractive), and litigants rated 1-3 received higher bail/fine setting than litigants rated a 4 or 5 (attractive).

McKelvie and Coley, 1993. No relations between sentencing and attractiveness, but it's speculated that the expressions of the criminals photographed did not elicit the intended effect from participants, as all were intended to look “sullen” or but several participants remarked that they looked like a “mugshots of criminals.” The cueing of a criminal stereotype might have washed out any effect attractiveness might have had in their experiment. Also, their tested conditions consisted of “unattractive” versus “moderately attractive” criminals. The moderately attractive condition was perhaps not enough to elicit a difference in treatment from the unattractive condition, whereas an effect might have been observable had a true “attractive” condition been present.

Wuensch, Chia, Castellow, and Chuang (1993) conducted research on the attraction-leniency effect in relationship to if attractiveness helps the defendant commit the crime. If attractiveness does not help the defendant commit the crime, ALE is present. If attractiveness helps defendant commit crime, ALE has the reverse effect. This might help explain the effects seen in Stewart (1980, 1984) and Sigall and Ostrove (1975). This is perceived to be a socially unacceptable use of the social skills and social competence associated with attractiveness, and is a violation of the “Beauty is good” stereotype (Eagly, 1991). Thus, the offense must be punished more severely to discourage the misuse of attractiveness, reversing the ALE effect.

Social desirability confounds with and has the power to override the effects of attractiveness in a legal scenario (Moore, Wuensch, Hedges, & Castellow, 1994). In an experiment manipulating both the attractiveness and the social desirability of a defendant, female jurors valued social desirability combined with attractiveness the most, and the perception of a
defendant’s social desirability had a greater influence on the outcome of the verdict than the perception of the defendant’s physical attractiveness.

Attractiveness and Punishment of Sexual Transgressions

The research supports that there is an Attraction-Leniency Effect in legal and quasi-situations, meaning more attractive defendants are generally punished less severely than their average or unattractive counterparts. Jurors react differently to attractiveness when the crime in question is of a sexual nature. Typically, the attractiveness of a victim or a plaintiff in a case does not have an effect the verdict or punishment of a defendant; only the defendant’s attractiveness produces an effect. However, when the case evaluates a sexual transgression, the physical attractiveness of both the defendant and the plaintiff affect the outcome of the case (Castellow, Wuensch, & Moore, 1990; Mazella & Feingold, 1994; Wuensch & Moore, 2004).

In 1977, Billy Thorton performed a study of the effect of a rape victim’s attractiveness has on credibility, responsibility, promiscuity, and the punishment of the assailant. He recruited students to participate in the experiment as “jurors.” The “jurors” were provided with case accounts and either an attractive victim photo, an unattractive victim photo, or no photo, and then asked to complete a survey. Punishment of the assailant was affected by the rape victim’s attractiveness in that they were given longer sentences. Attractive victims were also rated as more promiscuous, but did this not have an effect on other dependent measures. He noted that a sex bias was present in that males tended to give longer sentences and women tended to convict more.

A rape victim’s attractiveness, disturbingly, influences how much she is believed to be at fault for the rape act, if the defendant is convicted, and the length of the sentence the defendant receives. Kanekar and Nazareth (1988) performed a as 2 (subject’s sex) X 2 (physically
attractive vs. unattractive victim) X 2 (physically hurt vs. not hurt victim) X 2 (emotionally disturbed vs. not emotionally disturbed victim) factorial design to explore how a rape victim’s physical hurt, psychological trauma, and attractiveness effected the outcome of a case.

Participants read manipulated accounts of the rape. Attractive rape victims were believed to be less at fault for the rape act, had their defendants convicted at a higher rate, and the recommended sentence length was significantly longer than unattractive rape victims. Male participants were more affected by the attractiveness manipulation and were more likely to place the victim at fault than female participants. Kanekar and Nazareth concluded, “though the interaction is somewhat complex and obscure, one might infer that sex bias in jurors or judges is more likely to appear in marginal or grey cases rather than clearly black or white conditions wherein the victim has either entirely positive or sympathy-eliciting features, or entirely negative or sympathy-inhibiting features” (p.40).

The study closest to what the current research attempted to replicate is Wuensch & Moore (2004). Wuensch and Moore (2004) arranged a mock jury scenario in which a male plaintiff and female defendant where on trial for sexual harassment. The research was conducted in part to add support to an earlier experiment which found that in a sexual harassment case, “The combination of attractive plaintiff-unattractive defendant yielded the highest percentage of guilty judgments, and the combination of attractive defendant-unattractive plaintiff yielded the lowest percentage of guilty votes” (Castellaw, Wuensch, & Moore, 1990). The attractiveness of both the plaintiff and the defendant were manipulated. Participants were more certain the defendant was guilty and twice as likely to find in favor of the plaintiff when the plaintiff was attractive rather than unattractive. Unattractive defendants were 2.5 times more likely to be found guilty than attractive defendants.
This study too showed a sex bias. Male jurors' verdicts were significantly affected by plaintiff attractiveness, but only when the defendant was attractive, there was no significant difference when she was unattractive. This may be in part due to a hypothesis of Etcoff's (1999) "Men are much more likely than women to infer that attractive women are high in sex drive and seek variety in their sexual lives" (in Wünsch & Moore, 2004, p. 215). Conversely, female jurors were more likely to find the defendant guilty if the plaintiff was attractive and the defendant unattractive. This might have occurred because females might identify the unattractive defendant as sexually frustrated and more likely to sexually harass a co-worker.

**Method**

Based on the empirical evidence of the literature review, it was hypothesized that the attractiveness of a victim in a case of sexual transgression would have an effect on theirs and the defendant's believability, severity of consequences, and the amount of fault attributed to the victim. The current research addresses this relationship by manipulating the facial attractiveness of a female employee filing a sexual harassment complaint against a male co-worker.

**Participants**

A convenience sample was selected from introduction to psychology students at North Central College. The students received course credit for their participation, but were instructed they did not have to participate or complete in the experiment if they did not want to. Consent forms were administered to all participants, and participants were debriefed about the purposes of the experiment.

The final sample composition was 51 college students (21 males and 30 females) who were enrolled in undergraduate psychology classes at a private, Midwestern college. Of those 96% were between the ages of 18 and 21, 38 (81%) identified themselves as
European/Caucasian, 3 (6%) identified themselves as African, one identified themselves as Asian, one identified themselves as Hispanic, 4 (8%) identified themselves as other/two or more races, and one student identified themselves as American (write-in).

Initially 18 completed the unattractive condition, 18 the attractive condition, and 16 the no picture condition. After analysis, one student in the no picture condition failed to complete the survey with the minimal amount of information required for testing, leaving the no picture condition with 15 participants.

Materials

Materials used in this study consisted of a consent form (See Appendix A), photographs of the plaintiff if in the attractive or unattractive condition (See Appendix C)\(^2\), a packet, and a written debriefing (See Appendix E). The packet contained the stimulus materials, manipulation check, and dependent measure (See Appendix B, D).

The consent form explained the setting of the experiment and what was expected from them as participants. They were informed that they were serving on a Mock Grievance Review Board for a company. They would be expected to read the employment laws pertaining to the complaints they would be reviewing, read statements on behalf of the employees involved, and recommend a course of action for the involved employees.

The cover sheet of the packet received by the participants explained what they would be expected to do as a member of the board. The following page contained a direct quote from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) about the legal definition of sexual

\(^2\)The photographs used for this study were used with generous permission from Martin Gründl at the University of Regensburg in Regensburg, Germany. The photographs were part of his extensive study on what makes a face attractive, “Beauty Check,” and each face was composed of several faces “averaged” into a single face by computer software. The faces I used for this study were the Prototypical “Sexy” female face and the Prototypical “Unsexy” female face.
harassment. This was followed by a five-question, multiple-choice manipulation check to assure participants understood the legal definition of sexual harassment. Next were the statements from the employees. The filer, a woman, complained about the over-affectionate nature of her co-worker, a male, and claims she has told him his behavior makes her uncomfortable. The male denied having any sort of malicious or sexual intent towards the female co-worker and claims ignorance about if he knew his behavior was offending her. After the statements, a brief paragraph informed the participant that both parties were at the same level in the company’s hierarchy, only one of them could afford to be fired, and that close working quarters demanded a speedy resolution to the grievance.

On the last page of the packet, basic demographics were asked of the participant, and they were also asked if they had “ever been involved in a case or hearing regarding sexual transgression” and “if yes, what was your role in the trial” to account for any personal bias in the experiment.

Procedure

Participants signed up for 1 of 12 time slots for group testing. These 12 groups were assigned to 1 of 3 conditions based on anticipated participant attendance. All conditions and materials were the same with the exception an attractiveness manipulation for the case’s plaintiff, serving as an independent measure. For the attractive and unattractive conditions, materials were paired with a photograph of a woman who identified as the plaintiff in the case alongside a box with the text “No Photo Available” identified as the defendant in the case (See Appendix B, C).

The three primary dependent measures consisted of believability (plaintiff and defendant, 7-point Likert scale) and conviction. In addition, if the conviction was in the plaintiff’s favor, dependent measures of severity consequence (7-point Likert scale) and recommendation of
action (write-in) for the defendant were measures. If the conviction was in the defendant’s favor, dependent measures of knowledgeable exaggeration, motivation for exaggeration (write-in), severity of consequence for exaggerating (7-point Likert scale), and recommendation of action (write-in) were measured regarding the plaintiff and the complaint she filed.

The sexual harassment scenario reported in the statements was chosen because did not contain a clear-cut case of intention and would be more susceptible to intervening variables. Also, I perceived a case of sexual harassment to be less emotionally charged than a case on sexual assault or something similar, allowing the independent variable of the female plaintiff’s attractiveness to have a maximum affect on dependent variables.

For conditions containing the attractiveness manipulation, before reviewing the packets, students were told the photographs were included to “Familiarize themselves with the people involved in the case. If you were actually employed at this company, you might know or recognize the persons involved in a grievance. These photographs help to simulate a real company situation.”

Results

The calculations of a one-way ANOVA with three levels yielded that in two of the dependent measures attractiveness had a significant effect. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The analysis of variance revealed a significant difference for plaintiff believability $F(2,48) = 3.663, p < .05$, and for the severity of defendant’s consequence $F(2,36) = 4.280, p < .05$. 
TABLE 1

Believability of plaintiff (Scale of 1 to 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>ATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>NO PICTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2

Severity of defendant's consequence (Scale of 1 to 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>ATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>NO PICTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-hoc analysis with the Tukey HSD found significance between the attractive and no picture conditions for plaintiff believability, effect size = 0.922, std error 0.358, sig 0.035.
Post-hoc analysis with the Tukey HSD for severity of defendant’s consequence found significance between attractive and no picture, effect size = 1.097, std error 0.440, sig. 0.045, and for attractive and unattractive, effect size = 1.041, std error 0.420, sig. 0.446.
No significant effects were reported for the believability of the defendant, the verdict, and if the plaintiff was believed to exaggerate. A chi-squared analysis was performed and found no relationship between gender, race, age, or previous involvement in legal case involving a sexual transgression. Additionally, several open-ended questions were asked. The coded qualitative data frequency according to condition can be found in Table 3 and Table 4. A third question asked as to why the plaintiff lied on the company report if the participant believed she lied yielded less than five responses; this data was not coded. Note that the unattractive and attractive conditions contained 18 participants each and the no picture condition contained only 15 participants.
TABLE 3

Recommendation of consequential action for defendant (if found defendant guilty)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>ATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>NO PICTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cease Contact</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid suspension or</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work more hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision or</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced leave (unspecif</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ic if paid)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay decrease</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers may total greater than original sample size due to responses containing more than one recommendation.

TABLE 4

Under “recommendation of consequential action for defendant,” wrote termination should occur if harassment continues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>ATTRACTIVE</th>
<th>NO PICTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Although this research yielded some interesting findings, not all of the hypotheses were fully supported. Attractiveness did not have large as an effect as anticipated for a majority of the measures. The experimental design may be flawed, but the experiment might be reflective of similar real-life behavior. However, factors that might have had an effect on the conditions must be examined.

It is possible that freshman, liberal art students at a small private college in the Midwest are primed to ignore the extralegal stimulus or generally make an effort to ignore such things. It is also possible that the way the independent variable was introduced into the experiment acted
as a primer to remind the participants to remain fair despite appearance (McKelvie & Coley, 1993).

The relationship that typically occurs with an unattractive, average/no picture, and attractive condition was absent in this study. Generally, the unattractive condition had affects similar to the no picture condition. It is speculated that while the photograph has been rated as the prototypical unattractive female face in the study conducted by Braun, Gründl, Marberger, and Scherber (2001), that additional characteristics generally associated with unattractiveness were absent in this stimulus. The stimulus photograph presented a prototypical unattractive female face without make-up, but to minimize other effects in there study, the attractiveness of a face was limited to descriptive characteristics of facial features and face shape. Thus, the both faces were of a female within normal weight range, clean appearance, unblemished skin, and showing no signs of advanced age such as grey hair, sagging skin, or wrinkles; all characteristics traditionally associated with unattractiveness (Braun, Gründl, Marberger, & Scherber, 2001).

The absence of a statistically significant pattern in the different dependent measures may exist because, in research, an attractive face plus additional cues produce more effect than the face alone (Langlois et al 2000). Additionally, female faces are in general rated more positively as per the female-positivity effect (Sigall & Ostrove, 1975).

While the scenario chosen was written with an ambiguity to try to maximize the attractiveness effects, perhaps it was still written too clearly as most (76.5%) of the participants named that the defendant was guilty of sexual harassment. At the same time, what appears to be a potentially significant sex bias was developing in terms of the verdict and the plaintiff’s attractiveness. A similar sex bias affect was seen in Kanekar and Nazareth (1988); male participants were more likely than female participants to be influenced by the attractiveness of a
rape victim when recommending a sentence to the defendant. Other studies found a similar sex bias in the realm of juror verdicts, specifically than male participants tend to be affected more by the attractiveness manipulation (Castellow, Wuensch, & Moore, 1990; Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988; Thorton, 1977; Wuensch & Moore, 2004). Wuensch, Campbell, Kesler, and Moore (2002) saw a similar sex bias affect with males; they tended to be more affected by racial manipulations in a case. Thorton (1977) and Wuensch and Moore (2004) also found a sex bias in that female participants tend to convict more than men. A larger sample would have likely yielded enough participants to conduct statistical measures for a sex bias.

The current researcher would like to further examine the potential for sex bias as related to a plaintiff’s attractiveness in a case of sexual transgression. Recommended future research would include replicating this study with equal proportions of male and female participants, and

The literature collected and current research suggests that is difficult, if not impossible, for people to remain unaffected by a person’s physical appearance when making a judgment of them. This is inability is particularly problematic in legal and quasi-legal situations when extralegal factors such as physical appearance are affecting verdicts and sentencing. Physical attractiveness tends to work in the favor of the more attractive party in a legal dispute (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992; Mazella & Feingold, 1994; Langlois et al 2000), and tends to work in favor of an attractive person facing legal action (Darby & Jeffers; Downs & Lyons, 1991; Efran, 1974; Solomon & Schopler, 1978; Stewart 1984; Stewart, 1980; Storck & Sigall, 1979; Wuensch & Moore, 2004). Even judges have a difficult time remaining objective in the face of physical attractiveness, and were shown in Downs and Lyons (1991) to be more affected by a defendant’s attractiveness when setting fines and bails than the case itself!
Differences exist in the way physical attractiveness is received by a juror or reviewer. Female juror or reviewer's verdicts remain relatively independent of a plaintiff's or defendant's attractiveness, unless the attractiveness manipulation is of a male (Wuensch & Moore, 2004). Sharma (1987) found that females were more lenient on attractive males transgressors, of course, the male transgressors were children, and so this may affect how much these effects can be generalized to the current topic. Females tend to convict more than males, or males tend to convict less than females, in cases of simulated sexual transgression (Moore, Wuensch, Hedges, & Castellow, 1994; Thorton, 1977; Wuensch & Moore, 2004). This affect can be explained in terms of a female's ability to empathize and identify with the plaintiff. There is also a sex difference in the way attractiveness of a plaintiff or defendant is processed.

Males tend to be much more affected by differences in attractiveness than females (Castellow, Wuensch, Moore, 1990; Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988; Thorton, 1977; Wuensch & Moore, 2004). This affect can be explained in terms of evolutionary psychology, acculturation, schematic processing, or attribution error. Evolutionary psychology supports the claim that males must be much more evaluative of attractiveness of both males and females in order to choose a mate healthy enough and young enough to bear their offspring (Langlois et al, 2000); however, the same study shows male attractiveness is as important for females when selecting a mate. There perceptiveness of attractiveness is heightened because sensitivity to such observations might determine the likelihood of their genetic material being passed on. Attractive females are rated so because they physically express the characteristics associated with fertility (Braun, Gründl, Marberger, & Scherber, 2001). It is also beneficial for males to be aware of other male's attractiveness to identify potential threats to their sexual relationship with their chosen mate. A colloquial observation of this idea in play would be the male backlash against
any newly minted, very attractive male celebrity with the accusation that said celebrity is a homosexual, thus hoping to deter attention away from the threat towards themselves. Conversely, females are heightened to perceive emotional stability and economic stability. If this were a study examining the effects of economic or social status on juror objectivity, it is suspected females would be more affected by those manipulations than males.

Acculturation may also play a role in determining the sex bias. Attractive women are displayed in advertisement material for everything from toothpaste to genital herpes medication. Women in American popular culture are something to be looked at, and cultural norms encourage the evaluation of a woman based on attractiveness alone (Braun, Gründl, Marberger, & Scherber, 2001). From this it becomes normative that women should be evaluated primarily on their attractiveness before any other characteristics come into play, and that men are the evaluators of such attractiveness while women are the observed. This acculturation no doubt interplays on a male’s schematic processing when evaluating an attractive female because primary evaluation of the female on attractiveness is second nature at this point in acculturation. Again, in this theoretical framework, women are used to be evaluated by men, and may empathize with the plaintiff or defendant regardless of attractiveness based on these experiences (Popovich et al 1996).

Given the relatively extensive research presented here, evidence is almost beyond contention that physical attractiveness is being taken into consideration in legal and quasi-legal situations when it ought to have no effect. The simplest way to control the intervening of this factor would be to remove the plaintiff and defendant from view of the jurors or reviewers; however, this is not a practical solution. The actual appearance of a plaintiff or defendant gives way to clues about their role in a legal situation through means of nonverbal behavior throughout
the trial, and the current research suggests that even having either of them present at all automatically increases their credibility in situation. The question thus becomes one of not whether a legal party should be present in a courtroom setting, but the extent to which their physical attractiveness should be addressed in a legal setting.

The polite and formal method of avoiding all talk of legal party’s attractiveness, while it may seem the most professional approach in this matter does not seem to be working. Several studies have shown that when jurors are primed to remember they should be fair regardless of extralegal factors, and appearance is included in the list of factors, seem to greatly reduce the affects attractiveness has on verdicts and sentencing. Even more effective is studies in which jurors are primed to favor a certain cognitive processing mode. Both Lieberman (2002) and Myers and Greene (2004) have found that priming for rational processing mode tends to eliminate extralegal factors, whereas priming for emotional processing mode “fosters a reliance on heuristic cues.” With this in mind, the extent to which victim statements should be included in a testimony should also be considered as they tend to emotionally charge the case, and this emotional priming could lead jurors away from making a judgment on the facts presented in the case and towards a judgment made on gut instinct.

Much as in the way visual attention is drawn to socially constructed notions of sex and race differences and these differences must then be regulated by government to show no discrimination is taking place in these protected categories, so might attention be drawn to visual evidence of legal parties in the courtroom to review the socially constructed associations with them and remind the people judging the case to remain objective in the face of these schematic social constructions.
About the Author

In accordance with my views on how the researcher has the potential to project their personality onto their findings, I shall tell you a bit about my background. Unfortunately, there was no practical way as an undergraduate to conduct my research in a more naturalistic setting, but I did the best I could providing the resources time and money could afford. I am currently 21, and until recently a double-major in Psychology and Sociology-and-Anthropology. I chose to study all three areas because I feel they complement one another, and that is it always good to have more than one discipline’s perspective on a social issue and its potential solutions. I also have minors in the Organizational Communications and the History of Ideas, which should in actuality be titled the History of Western Thought; it’s an opportunity for students to read influential original works from Socrates up through Foucault. Through the years I have become increasingly interested in organizational structure and policies, women’s studies, and how the two might interplay off one another. Hence this thesis focusing on the interaction of sexual transgression and attractiveness. I plan to go to graduate school in the fall to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology. There, I have said my piece, feel free to criticize any irrational points I will make on this basis, but be forewarned you might be overgeneralizing my point of view based on illusory correlations and availability heuristics you have had with former females of the same intellectual persuasion!
References


*In J.A. Simpson & D. T. Kenrick (Eds.), Evolutionary social psychology, 169-195.


APPENDIX A: Informed Consent

Dear Mr. or Ms.,

Imagine that you are being asked to sit on a review panel for a company. You will be asked to review cases presented to you and decide which parties, if any, are at fault, and what penalties should be incurred on those who are at fault. Currently, you are being requested to review a mock grievance about sexual harassment that has been filed within the company. Sitting on this panel is voluntary and is viewed as a service to the community of the company, helping to maintain justice within the organization.

During this mock panel, you will be asked to read the two statements presented, both fictitious, read an explanation of what the government considers sexual harassment, and answer questions regarding what you have read. If at time you feel uncomfortable with the procedure or the questions asked, or simply wish to no longer participate, you may ask to be excused from the panel (study) or skip the question without penalty to your record.*

If the contents presented in this study should disturb you, please contact the Dyson Wellness Center on campus (630-637-5550) during regular business hours for counseling or Campus Security for emergency/immediate assistance (630-637-5911).

These “preliminary hearings” should last no longer than half an hour. Your identity and involvement with this study will remain confidential and undisclosed at all times.

Please sign and date below indicating you have read the preceding paragraphs and consent to participate on this mock grievance panel for this study:

☐ Yes, I have read the preceding paragraphs and agree to participate in the panel.
☐ No, I have read the preceding paragraphs and decline participating in the panel.

Name (Please Print)

__________________________________________
Signature

__________________________________________
Date

*You will not be penalized participation credit for your class.
APPENDIX B: Stimulus Material and Manipulation Check

The complaint being reviewed today involves an allegation of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is defined by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as,

“A form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.”

The EEOC further explains, “Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

- The victim as well as the harasser may be a woman or a man. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The harasser can be the victim’s supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- The harasser’s conduct must be unwelcome.”

---

Please take a moment to answer the following questions.

1) Is the request of a sexual favor in exchange for employment compensation (raise, promotion, time off) considered sexual harassment?  
   A) Yes    B) No

2) If a person is offended by a co-worker’s sexual comments, even if the comments are directed at someone else, could this be considered sexual harassment?  
   A) Yes    B) No

3) Is an unwanted compliment considered sexual harassment if the accuser does not indicate their discomfort to the person complimenting them?  
   A) Yes    B) No

4) Must the harasser be the opposite sex of the accuser for it to be sexual harassment?  
   A) Yes    B) No

5) Can unwelcome jokes about someone’s sexuality be sexual harassment?  
   A) Yes    B) No
Statements submitted by the parties involved:

**Bernice Simmons, Customer Relations**: Plaintiff who Filed the Complaint

"I have asked Walt repeatedly to stop invading my work space. He comes into my cubicle without asking my permission, leans over my shoulder while we are working together, and smiles suggestively after glancing me up and down. Occasionally, while he is talking to me or someone else, he’ll drape his arm around my shoulders or rest his hand on my arm. He’s also been known to grab my leg if we should be seated close to one another. He does this to other employees as well; I know I can’t be the only one bothered by his behavior. However, how they feel about this is their business, his behavior bothers me greatly, makes me uncomfortable, and I dread running into him at work. I have told him to please respect my space, but he won’t listen. I feel the board needs to reprimand his behavior."

**Walt Fitzgerald, Customer Relations**: Defendant Accused of Sexually Harassing Ms. Simmons

"I grew up in a very ‘hands on’ family. I make frequent contact with people I like or feel close to express my approval when words fail me, only in a friendly manner of course as the sexual manner is inappropriate for the workplace. I don’t understand what’s sexual about touching a co-worker’s arm or shoulder while I’m talking to them. I understand how Bernice could feel how my slapping her on the knee when I tell her a funny story could be misinterpreted as sexual, I’ve since stopped that, but I don’t understand how my smiling at her or leaning close to her when working on a project so I can hear her over the constant ringing phones can be considered harassment. Bernice has told me to mind my own space, but we work together so often and in such close quarters, it’s hard to stay four feet away from her at all times. She knows I’m just a friendly guy who means no harm, and no one else seems to be bothered by my behavior or mistake it for sexual advances, which it isn’t, including the 8 other women I work with."

Both employees have been with the company about the same amount of time and have not had previous grievances filed either for or against them. Their department working with 17 people within a 25 by 15 foot space, sometimes two people to a cubicle, due to budget cutbacks. However, as the department’s workload primarily concerns checking orders and taking phone calls, this space has been deemed sufficient to operate properly. The company can only afford to lay off one person in this department if the board should conclude these grievances irreconcilable.
APPENDIX C: Attractiveness Manipulation

Attractive Female Plaintiff

Unattractive Female Plaintiff
APPENDIX D: Dependent Measures

Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability, only give whole numbers when questions require a numerical rating. Your responses will help the company determine how to best resolve this grievance.

1. How did you find each employee's statement, that is, did you believe them to be telling the truth?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lying</th>
<th>Mixed/Can’t Tell</th>
<th>Telling Truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Simmons</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5</td>
<td>6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Fitzgerald</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5</td>
<td>6 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Do you believe Mr. Fitzgerald is guilty of committing sexual harassment against Ms. Simmons?

   A) Yes  B) No

If yes, proceed here. If no, skip to the next section.

If yes...

1. On a scale of one (1) to seven (7), one (1) being no consequence and seven (7) being termination, how severely do you feel Mr. Fitzgerald should be reprimanded for his behavior?

2. Recommendation of action (what, if any, punitive action do you believe Mr. Fitzgerald should receive)

If no...

1. Do you believe Ms. Simmons was knowledgeably exaggerating her complaints?

   A) No  B) Yes

2. If you believe she knowledgeably exaggerated, what might have motivated her to exaggerate in her report?
3. On a scale of one (1) to seven (7), one (1) being no consequence and seven (7) being termination, how severely do you feel Ms. Simmons should be reprimanded for exaggerating on a company report?

4. Recommendation of action (what, if any, punitive action do you believe Ms. Simmons should receive)

Information about you:

Age ___________ Gender _________

Race (check all that apply)

☐ European   ☐ African   ☐ Asian

☐ Hispanic   ☐ Other (please fill in) ______________________

Highest level of education completed? If in between degrees, write how many years have put towards the degree you are working towards.

Have you ever been involved in a case or hearing regarding sexual transgression? (Sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, etc.—any sexual behavior not tolerated by law).

If yes, what was your role in the trial?

Thanks!
APPENDIX E: Debriefing
Written Debriefing for “Mock Grievance Review Panel”

Dear Student,

I am interested in studying the interaction between attractiveness, believability, punishment, and perhaps gender, particularly in regards to when someone violates what is considered acceptable sexual behavior.

There is a theory called the Attraction-Leniency Effect which is best summed up in the following excerpt from John E. Stewart II’s paper “Appearance and Punishment: The Attraction-Leniency Effect in the Courtroom,” published in The Journal of Social Psychology (1989):

The idea that physical and social attractiveness are attributes that work to a person’s advantage in situations involving wrongdoing has received considerable support in the research literature. Efran (1974), Sigall and Ostrove (1975), and Solomon and Schopler (1978), manipulating the physical attractiveness of a stimulus person through the use of photographs, found that, in general, college students playing the role of juror recommended less severe punishment for the attractive than for the unattractive stimulus person.

There is extensive research in the area of how a defendant’s appearance affects the punishment they receive in a courtroom. I am interested to see if a plaintiff’s appearance also affects this punishment and how the case is perceived. In particular, I believe a woman’s appearance works against her when she is pursuing a case where she believes she has been wronged in a sexual manner.

In this study, I hypothesize that while the statements of two people involved in a sexual harassment grievance (complaint) will not change, changing the person’s attractiveness and perhaps their gender will effect how these statements are perceived. I hypothesize that this change in perception will affect the degree to which the persons involved are punished, and how believable their statements seem.

My project will not be completed until the end of Winter Term, but if you wish to receive a completed copy, simply respond to this email with a yes, name, and email address, and I will send you a completed copy.

I ask you to please not talk about the purposes of this study among your fellow classmates until after November 23, 2004 to minimize participant bias. If participant react to an experiment the way they think the experimenter wants them to rather than honestly this can cause this bias. If participants know in advance what my experiment is testing, this might be caused and it would make my data less reliable.

Thanks for your time!

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NCC Campus Mail #1058  

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