

Responding to sexual harassment complaints: Effects of a dissolved workplace romance on decision-making standards[☆]

Charles A. Pierce,^{a,*} Brandee J. Broberg,^b Jamie R. McClure,^b and Herman Aguinis^c

^a Department of Management, Fogelman College of Business and Economics, University of Memphis, USA

^b Department of Psychology, Montana State University, USA

^c The Business School, University of Colorado at Denver, USA

Received 31 March 2002

Available online 17 July 2004

Abstract

We introduce and provide support for an ethical decision-making framework as an explanation for the social–cognitive process through which observers make decisions about a sexual harassment complaint that stems from a prior workplace romance. We conducted two experiments to examine effects of features of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance and subsequent harassing behavior on raters' responses to a sexual harassment complaint. In Experiment 1, results based on a sample of 217 employees indicate that their attributions of responsibility for the harassment mediated the link between their knowledge of features of the romance and three recommended personnel actions. In Experiment 2, results based on a sample of 258 members of the Society for Human Resource Management indicate that their degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral mediated the link between their knowledge of features of the romance and harassment and their attributions of responsibility. Raters' attributions of responsibility, in turn, predicted three recommended personnel actions. We discuss theoretical and practical implications from an ethical decision-making perspective.

© 2004 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Workplace romance; Sexual harassment; Ethical decision making

Workplace romances and sexually harassing behavior have become commonplace in organizations. Workplace romances are mutually desired relationships involving physical attraction between two employees of the same organization (Pierce, 1998; Pierce & Aguinis, 2003;

Pierce, Byrne, & Aguinis, 1996; Powell & Foley, 1998). They represent approximately 33% of all romantic relationships in the US (Bureau of National Affairs, 1988) and results from a survey of 617 human resource professionals suggest that their frequency has remained stable or increased in recent years (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 1998). Sexually harassing behavior at work involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1993). Less blatant types such as gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention, which constitute hostile work environment harassment, are more common than blatant types such as sexual coercion, which constitutes quid pro quo harassment. Between 25 and 50% of women in the US labor force have experienced at least one behavior that could be construed as gender harassment or unwanted sexual attention (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, &

[☆] Brandee Broberg is now at T-Mobile, Overland Park, KS. Jamie McClure is now at Jim Palmer Trucking, Missoula, MT. This article is based on Brandee Broberg's and Jamie McClure's masters theses, which were completed at Montana State University under the direction of Chuck Pierce. We thank Richard F. Martell for helpful comments on earlier versions. Portions of this article were presented at the meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Chicago, April 2004.

* Corresponding author. Present address: Department of Management, Fogelman College of Business and Economics, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152-3120, USA. Fax: 1-901-678-4990. Research conducted while at Montana State university.

E-mail addresses: capierce@montana.edu, capierce@memphis.edu (C.A. Pierce), herman.aguinis@cudenver.edu (H. Aguinis).

Drasgow, 1995; US Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1994).

Although workplace romance and sexual harassment are conceptually and legally distinct, researchers have begun to question whether they are independent social–sexual phenomena (Pierce & Aguinis, 1997, 2001; Pierce, Aguinis, & Adams, 2000; Summers & Myklebust, 1992). The concern is that dissolved workplace romances can foster sexually harassing behavior between former relational participants. Consider the following evidence: (a) nearly 50% of workplace romances dissolve (Henry, 1995), (b) 24% of 617 human resource professionals reported that sexual harassment claims occurred in their organization as a direct result of workplace romances (SHRM, 1998), and (c) 26% of 466 human resource professionals and 31% of 557 other employees reported that sexual harassment claims occurred in their organization as a direct result of workplace romances (SHRM, 2002). In addition, recent federal cases have dealt with dissolved workplace romances that resulted in sexual harassment claims supported by the courts (e.g., Jones v. Keith, 2002; McDonough v. Smith, 2001). It is important to note, however, that sexual harassment claims filed as a result of a dissolved workplace romance are not always upheld in court. The outcome of these types of cases may depend, in part, on whether the harassing behavior was a function of gender discrimination as opposed to merely a personal animosity arising from the dissolved romance (e.g., see *Grandquest v. Mobile Pulley & Machine Works*, 2001; *Pipkins v. City of Temple Terrace, Fl.*, 2001; *Succar v. Dade County School Board*, 2000). Nevertheless, the concern about sexual harassment complaints stemming from dissolved workplace romances is warranted.

Organizations face the problem that a prior workplace romance may affect investigators' decisions about an ensuing sexual harassment complaint. Specifically, judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a harassment accusation are affected by whether the accused and complainant were previously involved with one another in a workplace romance. A prior romance between a male accused and a female complainant can result in more favorable judgments and recommended actions regarding the accused and less favorable judgments and recommended actions regarding the complainant (Summers & Myklebust, 1992). Above and beyond the mere history of a romance, certain features of a dissolved workplace romance (e.g., romance motives, lateral vs. hierarchical romance) can also influence judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a sexual harassment incrimination (Pierce et al., 2000).

With regard to an explanation for the influence of a prior romance on raters' decisions, Summers and Myklebust (1992) suggested that investigators of harassment complaints may set different standards for

determining acceptable social–sexual behavior when an accused and complainant have a prior history of romantic involvement. Results of Pierce et al.'s (2000) study provide support for this suggestion in that raters' responses to a harassment accusation were influenced by specific features of a prior workplace romance. The use of different standards for determining acceptable social–sexual behavior when an accused and complainant have a prior history of romantic involvement is apt to lead to perceptions of injustice among harasses and co-workers and, moreover, could result in legal problems for the organization (cf. Foley & Powell, 1999).

Ethical decision-making framework

Observers' knowledge of a prior history of workplace romance and knowledge of features of a dissolved workplace romance affect their decisions about ensuing sexual harassment complaints (Pierce et al., 2000; Summers & Myklebust, 1992). However, researchers have yet to provide a theoretical foundation from which to interpret this phenomenon. What is missing is a theory-based explanation for the underlying social–cognitive process that explains observers' decision making. We propose that the link between dissolved workplace romances and observers' decisions about ensuing sexual harassment complaints can be explained using Jones' (1991) issue-contingent model of ethical decision making in organizations. According to Jones' (1991) theoretical framework, an ethical or moral issue exists when an individual's voluntary actions may harm or benefit another person. Based on this definition, an employee's participation in romantic or sexually harassing behavior at work constitutes a moral act (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). The moral issue that raters investigate herein is social–sexual behavior at work whereby a dissolved workplace romance and the ensuing sexual harassment are each exhibits of such behavior.

Jones' (1991) framework asserts that moral issues such as social–sexual behavior at work vary in terms of their perceived *moral intensity*. The moral intensity of an issue is determined by features of the issue that can vary with respect to their perceived magnitude of consequences and social consensus (Barnett, 2001; Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999). In the present study, features of the dissolved workplace romance and harassing behavior represent characteristics of the moral issue that vary in terms of their moral intensity. Magnitude of consequences is an individual's perceived degree of benefit or harm that a moral act inflicts upon a target. Social consensus is an individual's perceived degree to which there is collective agreement that a moral act is good or evil or, for purposes of this study, appropriate or

inappropriate. The greater the perceived magnitude of consequences of, or social consensus regarding, a moral issue, the greater the issue's perceived degree of moral intensity. An issue's perceived degree of moral intensity predicts the extent to which an observer considers the issue to be ethical in nature (Jones, 1991).

According to Jones' (1991) model, when individuals are confronted with the task of observing and then making decisions about a moral issue such as employees' social–sexual behavior, they progress sequentially through four stages of ethical decision making. These stages of decision making in which observers engage their ethics schemas are as follows: recognizing the issue as moral, making a moral judgment, establishing intentions to behave in accordance with the moral judgment, and engaging in moral behavior (cf. Rest, 1986; Trevino, 1986). With respect to Jones' (1991) proposed mediation sequence, each of these stages can be directly affected by the observers' perceived moral intensity of the issue under scrutiny. In addition, each of the first three stages is a mediator between observers' perceived moral intensity of an issue and their decisions at the subsequent stage. For example, observers' judgments about a moral issue are predicted to mediate the relationship between their perceived moral intensity of the issue and their intent to behave in accordance with their judgments. Regarding the moral issue of social–sexual behavior at work, we suspect that investigators of sexual harassment complaints perceive certain features of dissolved workplace romances and subsequent harassing behavior as having various degrees of moral intensity. Consequently, we hypothesize that investigators respond to these harassment complaints via the stages described in Jones' (1991) framework.

The aim of the present research was to use Jones' (1991) ethical decision-making framework to explain how a dissolved workplace romance affects observers' decisions about an ensuing sexual harassment complaint. Specifically, we conducted two field experiments to examine whether features of a dissolved workplace romance and subsequent harassing behavior between a male supervisor and a female subordinate affect raters' responses to a sexual harassment complaint. The rationale for examining hierarchical romances is twofold. First, they are more common than romances between employees with equal rank (Dillard, Hale, & Segrin, 1994; Quinn, 1977). Second, the organization-based social power differential inherent in hierarchical romances may increase the likelihood of sexually harassing behavior between former relational participants (Pierce & Aguinis, 2001). In both experiments, the male supervisor was depicted as the accused and the female subordinate was depicted as the complainant because men are more likely to harass and women are more likely to be harassed (Gutek, 1985; Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990; USMSPB, 1994).

Experiment 1

The goal of Experiment 1 was to determine whether observers' judgments of responsibility for harassing behavior mediate the link between their knowledge of features of a dissolved romance and their subsequent recommended personnel actions. With respect to the second and third stages in Jones' (1991) model, raters' attributions of responsibility represent making judgments about a moral issue and their recommended personnel actions represent establishing intent to behave in accordance with those judgments. Thus, drawing from Jones' (1991) model, raters' judgments about who is responsible for harassing behavior should predict their behavioral intentions or, in this case, their recommendations about appropriate personnel actions (cf. Barnett, 2001). Next, we discuss features of a component of the social–sexual behavior (i.e., the dissolved workplace romance) that vary in terms of their perceived magnitude of consequences or social consensus. Because these features vary with respect to their moral intensity, according to Jones' (1991) they should affect raters' judgments of responsibility for the harassment which, in turn, should predict their recommended personnel actions.

Attributions of responsibility

Supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship

Employees perceive hierarchical romances as more ethically inappropriate compared to lateral romances for reasons such as jealousy and suspicion regarding favoritism (Jones, 1999; Mainiero, 1986; Powell, 2001). Thus, a hierarchical romance involving a direct-reporting supervisor–subordinate relationship should be perceived by observers as even more ethically inappropriate than a hierarchical romance involving an indirect-reporting supervisor–subordinate relationship. A direct-reporting hierarchical romance in which a subordinate is involved with his or her immediate supervisor entails a greater dependency and social power differential than an indirect-reporting hierarchical romance in which a subordinate is involved with a supervisor who works in a different unit within the organization. As a consequence of this greater dependency and power differential, employees may be more jealous and suspicious of direct-reporting than indirect-reporting romances. Finally, with respect to the perceived magnitude of consequences, direct-reporting hierarchical romances have the potential to produce more harm (e.g., changes in subordinate's workload or allocation of resources) compared to indirect-reporting hierarchical romances. We tested the following:

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 in-

volved in a hierarchical workplace romance that entailed a direct-reporting as opposed to an indirect-reporting relationship.

Type of workplace romance

Three of the most common types of workplace romances are a companionate romance, a fling, and a utilitarian romance, each of which occur with approximately equal frequency (Dillard et al., 1994). A companionate romance is when each partner has a sincere love motive, a fling is when each partner has an ego motive, and a utilitarian romance is when a lower-rank employee has a job-related motive and a higher-rank employee has an ego motive (Dillard et al., 1994; Powell & Foley, 1998). A companionate romance and fling therefore involve matched motives, whereas a utilitarian romance involves mismatched motives. A love motive entails a sincere desire to seek a long-term companion or spouse, an ego motive entails a desire to seek adventure, excitement, sexual experience, or ego satisfaction, and a job-related motive entails a desire to seek advancement, security, power, financial rewards, lighter workloads, or more vacation time (Dillard, 1987; Quinn, 1977). Observers of workplace romances perceive a love motive as genuine and appropriate, whereas ego and particularly job-related motives are perceived as less genuine and inappropriate (Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989; Dillard et al., 1994). Observers perceive a workplace romance involving a job-related motive as the least genuine type of romance because it has the greatest potential of influencing their own and others' jobs, it can have a negative effect on the work environment's social climate, and it can decrease an organization's effectiveness (Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Dillard et al., 1994; Mainiero, 1986). For hierarchical romances in which the lower-rank employee has a job-related motive and the higher-rank employee has an ego motive, the potential for favoritism and exploitation is much greater than when a romance entails only love or ego motives (Pierce & Aguinis, 2001; Powell & Foley, 1998). In sum, there is social consensus that when considering the perceived degree of sincerity of their corresponding romance motives, a utilitarian romance is more ethically inappropriate compared to a companionate romance or fling. We tested the following:

Hypothesis 2. Raters will judge a male accused of sexual harassment as less responsible and a female complainant as more responsible for the harassing behavior when the accused and complainant were previously involved in a hierarchical workplace romance that was utilitarian as opposed to either companionate or a fling.

Personnel actions

Organizations use a variety of personnel actions in response to managing workplace romances and sexually

harassing behavior (SHRM, 1998, 2002). These actions have been categorized and range in order of increasing severity from *no action* (e.g., ignore or drop the issue) to *remedial action* (e.g., social support, counseling) to *punitive action* (e.g., discipline) (see Foley & Powell, 1999; Mainiero, 1986; Powell & Foley, 1998; Quinn, 1977). When responding to a harassment complaint, raters perceive the degree of appropriateness of these actions differently depending on whether the accused and complainant had a history of workplace romance (Summers & Myklebust, 1992) and whether the prior romance was lateral versus direct-reporting hierarchical (Pierce et al., 2000). Raters in Summers and Myklebust's study, for example, reported that it is less appropriate to discipline a male accused of sexual harassment when he and a female complainant had a prior history of workplace romance. Thus, as with their judgments of responsibility, raters' recommended personnel actions may also be the result of setting different standards for determining acceptable social–sexual behavior when an accused and complainant have a history of romantic involvement. Based on the second and third stages in Jones' (1991) model, raters' recommendations about appropriate personnel actions should be in accordance with, and follow from, their judgments of responsibility for the harassing behavior. We tested the following:

Hypothesis 3. Raters will recommend that a remedial (e.g., social support, counseling) or punitive (e.g., discipline) action should be taken toward a male accused of sexual harassment when they judge him as responsible for his harassing behavior. Alternatively, when raters judge the female complainant as responsible for the accused's harassing behavior, they will recommend that no action should be taken (e.g., ignore or drop the issue).

Our rationale for the latter part of Hypothesis 3 is that if an observer judges the complainant as responsible for fostering the accused's harassing behavior, the observer would probably advise that the complainant not file a claim against the accused because it may not be supported.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 217 employees from three organizations in the central US: a clothing manufacturer ($n = 100$), a service provider for the homeless ($n = 91$), and an accounting firm ($n = 26$). Demographics of the participants are as follows: 33% men; 80% whites, 2% Latinos, 9% African Americans, and 1% Native Americans; 28% single, 53% married, and 14% divorced. Age of participants ranged from 17 to 83 years ($M [SD] = 36.8 [11.0]$), tenure in their organization ranged from 1 month to 34 years ($M [SD] = 5.1 [5.3]$ years), and 95% were

employed full time. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated that participants' organization, sex, ethnicity, marital status, and employment status did not yield main or interactive effects on their attributions of responsibility or recommended personnel actions ($ps > .05$). Moreover, participants' age and tenure in the organization did not correlate with their attributions of responsibility or recommended personnel actions ($ps > .05$).

Design and procedure

Over a one-week period, questionnaires were administered to and collected from 217 employees during their regular work hours as part of a study on "relationships in the workplace." Participation was voluntary and responses were made anonymously. All employees of the service provider for the homeless and all employees of the accounting firm served as participants. All employees of the clothing manufacturer who attended work during the week of data collection also served as participants. The questionnaires contained a vignette describing a dissolved workplace romance and a subsequent hostile environment harassment complaint, manipulation check and background information questions, and measures of study variables along with participants' demographics.

Each participant read a vignette that depicted two employees, Keith and Sara, who were previously involved for three years in either a direct-reporting (Keith and Sara work in the same department; Keith is Sara's supervisor) or an indirect-reporting (Keith and Sara work in different departments; Keith is not Sara's supervisor, but he is a supervisor in another part of the same organization) hierarchical workplace romance. Keith's motive for dating Sara was described as either love or ego and Sara's motive for dating Keith was described as either love, ego, or job-related. Based on the pairing of Keith's and Sara's romance motives, the type of workplace romance depicted was either companionate, a fling, or utilitarian. The vignette indicated that a few weeks after their romance was mutually terminated, Sara accused Keith of sexually harassing her at work and reported her complaint to upper-level management. Sara's complaint was that, even after being repeatedly asked to stop, Keith persisted in rubbing her neck and shoulders at work and telling her sexual jokes that she found offensive. Keith was thus accused of unwanted sexual attention and offensive sexual joking, both of which are defined as hostile environment harassing behavior (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Terpstra & Baker, 1992).

In sum, each participant was randomly assigned to read one of six vignettes in a 2 (supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship: direct reporting vs. indirect reporting) \times 3 (type of workplace romance: companionate, fling, or utilitarian) between-subjects experiment.

Measures

Manipulation checks. On a separate page prior to the measures of our study variables, we used two items to assess whether supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship and type of workplace romance were manipulated successfully. We used three additional items to determine whether participants accurately perceived background information presented in the vignette.

Attributions of responsibility. Participants indicated their agreement with 18 statements describing potential reasons for Sara's sexual harassment complaint (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; items from Summers, 1991, 1996; and Summers & Myklebust, 1992). Nine items involved judging the accused (e.g., "Keith is responsible for the sexual harassment complaint") and nine items involved judging the complainant (e.g., "Sara is responsible for creating the sexual harassment situation"). A confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 4.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) supported the fit of a two-factor model for the judgment items [Comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, Incremental fit index (IFI) = .96, Normed fit index (NFI) = .94, Relative fit index (RFI) = .93]. (Results of all factor and path analyses reported herein are based on using raw data as input, maximum likelihood estimation, and Amos 4.0.) Moreover, the two-factor model provided a superior fit to a nested one-factor model ($\chi^2_{diff}[1, N = 217] = 180.60, p < .05$). The two factors underlying the items represent the following attributions of responsibility (range of factor loadings in parentheses): judgment of the accused (.38–.81) and judgment of the complainant (.44–.81). All loadings were significant at $p < .05$.

Personnel actions. Participants were asked to rate the appropriateness of 13 personnel actions that could be taken in response to Sara's sexual harassment complaint (1 = *not appropriate*, 4 = *moderately appropriate*, 7 = *very appropriate*; items from Summers, 1991, 1996; and Summers & Myklebust, 1992). The items involved rating whether it was appropriate to (a) ignore or drop the issue (3 items), (b) provide the accused and complainant with social support and sympathy (2 items), (c) provide the accused and complainant with company-funded counseling (2 items), and (d) implement disciplinary actions directed toward the accused (e.g., verbal reprimand, written reprimand, suspension, transfer, termination) (6 items). A confirmatory factor analysis supported the fit of a four-factor model for the personnel action items (CFI and IFI = .99, NFI = .98, RFI = .96). Furthermore, the four-factor model provided a superior fit to a nested one-factor model ($\chi^2_{diff}[6, N = 217] = 611.09, p < .05$). The four factors underlying the items represent the following recommended actions (range of factor loadings in parentheses): ignore/drop issue as no action (.57–.88), social support as a remedial action (.56–.99), company-funded counseling as a remedial action (.92–.95), and discipline

as a punitive action (.36–.89). All loadings were significant at $p < .05$.

The judgments of responsibility and recommended actions measures have acceptable psychometric properties with respect to their reliability (Pierce et al., 2000; Summers, 1991; Summers & Myklebust, 1992) and convergent as well as discriminant validity (Pierce et al., 2000). Specifically, Cronbach's α s have ranged from .72 to .91. In addition, Pierce et al.'s (2000) measurement-only model revealed that (a) judgments of the accused are negatively correlated with judgments of the complainant; (b) the recommended action of ignore/drop issue is negatively correlated with counseling; (c) the recommended action of social support is positively correlated with counseling; and (d) judgments of the accused and complainant, as well as the recommended actions of ignore/drop issue, social support, and counseling, are not correlated with raters' attitudes toward romance and sexual intimacy at work.

Results and discussion

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for all variables in Experiment 1. Consistent with Pierce et al. (2000), raters' judgments of the accused are negatively correlated with judgments of the complainant, the recommended action of ignore/drop issue is negatively correlated with counseling, and the recommended action of social support is positively correlated with counseling.

Manipulation checks

Ninety-seven percent of the participants accurately reported the nature of Keith and Sara's reporting rela-

tionship and 94% accurately reported the type of workplace romance in which Keith and Sara were previously involved. The two independent variables were thus manipulated successfully. Also, 98% of the participants correctly indicated where Keith and Sara were employed, 94% correctly indicated that Keith and Sara had been dating for three years, and 96% correctly indicated that the nature of the alleged sexually harassing behavior was both physical and verbal.

Test of a hypothesized model

To test Hypotheses 1–3, we examined a single-indicator, path-analytic model that specified (a) supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship (direct reporting vs. indirect reporting) and type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian) as having direct effects on raters' attributions of responsibility for the harassment; and (b) raters' attributions of responsibility as predictors of each of the four personnel actions (see Fig. 1).

In support of Hypothesis 1, there was a main effect of supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship on raters' attributions of responsibility for the accused ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$) and complainant ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$). As expected, the means shown in Table 2 indicate that the accused was judged as more responsible for the harassing behavior when the supervisor–subordinate relationship was direct reporting ($M = 4.37$) as opposed to indirect reporting ($M = 4.00$), whereas the complainant was judged as less responsible when the relationship was direct reporting ($M = 3.61$) as opposed to indirect reporting ($M = 3.94$).

In partial support of Hypothesis 2, there was a main effect of type of workplace romance only on raters' at-

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for independent^a, mediator^b, and outcome^c variables in Experiment 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Romance characteristics ^a											
1. Reporting relationship	1.52	0.50	—								
2. Type of romance (O1)	0.05	0.80	.06	—							
3. Type of romance (O2)	−0.08	1.44	.01	.05	—						
Attributions of responsibility ^b											
4. Judgment of accused	4.19	1.07	−.18*	−.07	−.05	(.84)					
5. Judgment of complainant	3.78	1.09	.15*	.15*	.11	−.58*	(.88)				
Personnel actions ^c											
6. No action (ignore/drop issue)	1.66	1.11	.09	.07	.00	−.23*	.33*	(.80)			
7. Remedial action (social support)	2.60	1.60	−.07	.03	−.13	.09	−.10	.02	(.74)		
8. Remedial action (counseling)	3.63	2.19	.10	−.11	−.12	.06	−.16*	−.20*	.26*	(.93)	
9. Punitive action (discipline)	2.42	1.27	−.11	.16*	−.04	.34*	−.16*	.09	.17*	.13	(.76)

Note. *N* ranged from 212 to 217. Cronbach's α s are in parentheses on the main diagonal.

^a Supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship was coded 1 = direct and 2 = indirect; type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian) was coded into two variables, O1 and O2, using orthogonal coding. O1 compares companionate to utilitarian, and O2 compares fling to companionate and utilitarian.

^b Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as responsible for the harassing behavior.

^c Greater scores indicate that the personnel action was considered appropriate.

* $p < .05$.

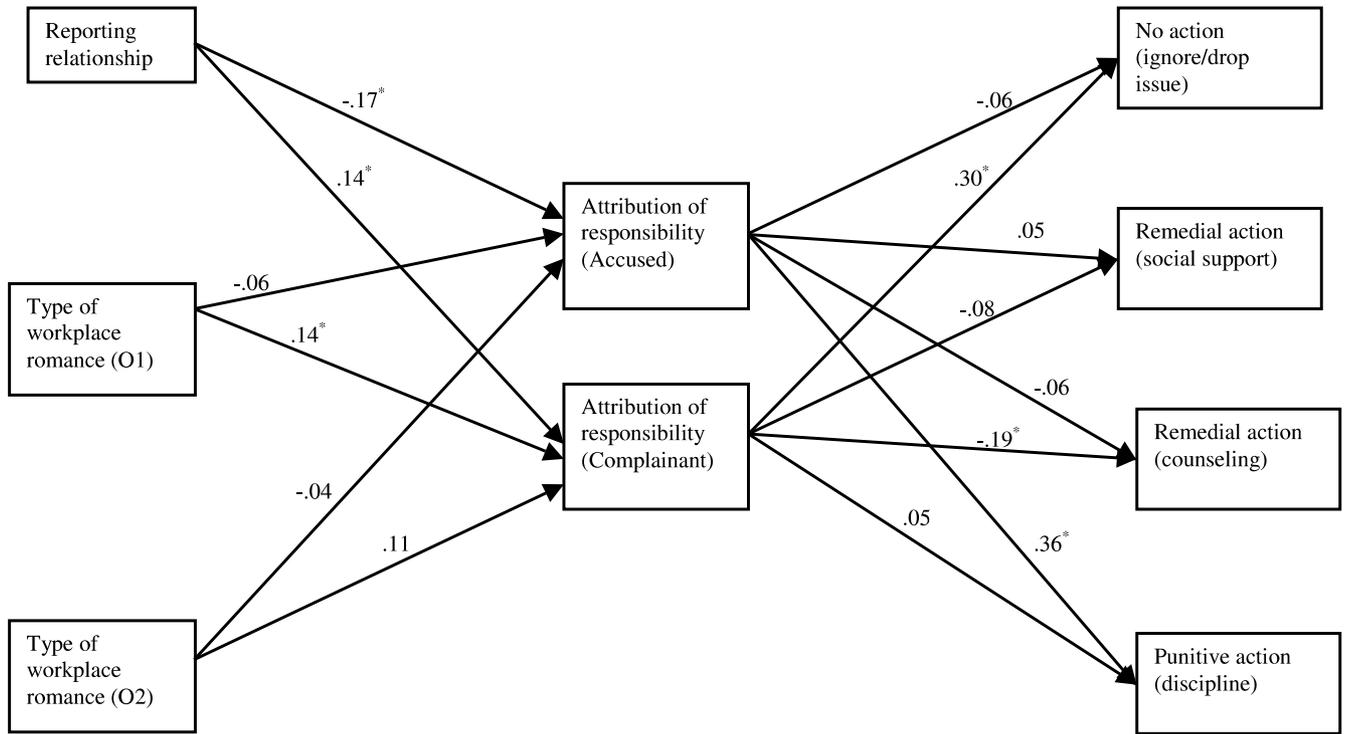


Fig. 1. Completely standardized path-analytic solution for independent, mediator, and outcome variables in Experiment 1. Type of workplace romance (companionate, fling, or utilitarian) was coded into two variables, O1 and O2, using orthogonal coding. O1 compares companionate to utilitarian, and O2 compares fling to companionate and utilitarian. Each endogenous variable was modeled with an error term. $*p < .05$.

tributions of responsibility for the complainant ($\beta_s = .14$ and $.11, p < .05$). Specifically, the means shown in Table 2 indicate that the complainant was judged as more responsible for the harassing behavior when she was previously involved in a utilitarian romance ($M = 4.06$) as opposed to either a companionate romance ($M = 3.66$) or fling ($M = 3.62$).

In support of Hypothesis 3, raters' attributions of responsibility for the accused predicted their recom-

mended action of discipline ($\beta = .36, p < .05$). Specifically, raters who judged the accused as responsible for the harassing behavior reported that it was more appropriate to discipline him compared to raters who did not judge the accused as responsible. Also in support of Hypothesis 3, raters' attributions of responsibility for the complainant predicted their recommended actions of ignore/drop issue ($\beta = .30, p < .05$) and counseling ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$). Specifically, raters who judged the

Table 2
Means and standard deviations for mediator^a and outcome^b variables in Experiment 1 by supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship and type of workplace romance

Variable	Reporting relationship				Type of romance					
	Direct		Indirect		Companionate		Fling		Utilitarian	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attributions of responsibility ^a										
1. Judgment of accused	4.37 ^c	1.09	4.00 ^c	1.01	4.25	1.20	4.23	1.02	4.06	0.98
2. Judgment of complainant	3.61 ^d	1.04	3.94 ^d	1.11	3.66 ^e	1.19	3.62	1.03	4.06 ^e	1.02
Personnel actions ^b										
3. No action (ignore/drop issue)	1.57	1.00	1.76	1.20	1.56	1.07	1.66	1.24	1.75	1.01
4. Remedial action (social support)	2.72	1.55	2.50	1.65	2.38	1.62	2.88	1.63	2.53	1.53
5. Remedial action (counseling)	3.42	2.15	3.84	2.22	3.74	2.37	3.99	2.23	3.18	1.93
6. Punitive action (discipline)	2.55	1.27	2.29	1.27	2.09 ^f	1.16	2.49	1.27	2.62 ^f	1.33

Note. N ranged from 212 to 216.

^a Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as responsible for the harassing behavior.

^b Greater scores indicate that the personnel action was considered appropriate. Means with the same superscript differ from one another at $p < .05$.

^{c-f} Means with the same superscript differ from one another at $p < .05$.

complainant as responsible for the harassing behavior reported that it was more appropriate to ignore/drop the issue, and less appropriate to provide counseling, compared to raters who did not judge the complainant as responsible.

Results of our path analysis support the fit of the model shown in Fig. 1 [CFI and IFI = .96, NFI = .95, RFI = .90, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .16, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .92]. The R^2 for this model was .36, whereby the R^2 was .27 for the personnel actions and .09 for attributions of responsibility.

Test of an alternative model

We also examined a single-indicator, path-analytic model that specified the same paths as those depicted in Fig. 1. However, we included additional paths that specified supervisor–subordinate reporting relationship and type of workplace romance as having direct effects on each of the personnel actions. All of the statistically significant paths in our hypothesized model remained significant in this alternative model. Above and beyond the significant paths shown in Fig. 1, this alternative model revealed a main effect of type of romance on the personnel action of discipline ($\beta_s = .19$ and $-.04$, $p < .05$; means reported in Table 2). All other direct effects between reporting relationship, type of romance, and the personnel actions were nonsignificant. Some of the fit indices for this alternative model were less than acceptable (RFI = .82, RMSEA = .23, TLI = .83) and some were acceptable (CFI and IFI = .96, NFI = .96). In short, the model shown in Fig. 1 provides a better fit compared to this alternative model ($\chi^2_{\text{diff}}[12, N = 217] = 21.41$, $p < .05$).

In summary, consistent with Jones' (1991) framework, results reveal that raters' judgments of responsibility for the harassment mediate the link between their knowledge of features of a dissolved workplace romance and their recommended personnel actions. Whereas Summers and Myklebust and Pierce et al. (2000) treated raters' attributions of responsibility and recommended actions as separate and unrelated outcome variables, our results show that raters' attributions of responsibility are a direct antecedent to their recommendations about appropriate personnel actions.

Experiment 2

The goal of Experiment 2 was to provide further tests of the appropriateness of using an ethical decision-making framework to explain how a dissolved workplace romance affects observers' decisions about an ensuing sexual harassment complaint. According to the first and second stages in Jones' (1991) model, observers' recognition of an issue as immoral is a predictor of how they make judgments about the issue. Thus, we exam-

ined whether raters' degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral mediates the link between (a) their knowledge of features of the workplace romance, an organization's workplace romance policy, and the sexually harassing behavior; and (b) their attributions of responsibility for the harassment. Next, we discuss each of these features that vary in terms of their perceived magnitude of consequences or social consensus. Because these features vary with respect to their moral intensity, according to Jones (1991) they should affect raters' degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral.

Recognition of social–sexual behavior as immoral

Illicitness of a workplace romance

When considering the societal taboo and legal issues surrounding adultery, it is not surprising that managers have reported that they would respond negatively to a workplace romance if one or both participants were married to someone else (Brown & Allgeier, 1995). With regard to social consensus, observers perceive extramarital workplace romances as more ethically inappropriate than nonextramarital workplace romances (Brown & Allgeier, 1996). These unfavorable perceptions may also stem from the fact that extramarital workplace romances are associated with negative changes in the social climate of a work environment (Dillard et al., 1994). If a direct-reporting hierarchical workplace romance is extramarital, observers may react unfavorably because the relationship represents both a moral and professional conflict of interest and thus would be expected to disrupt the workgroup (cf. Foley & Powell, 1999). We tested the following:

Hypothesis 4. Raters will perceive the accused's social–sexual behavior as more immoral if it is the result of an extramarital as opposed to a nonextramarital hierarchical workplace romance.

Presence of a workplace romance policy

An organization's culture is partially determined by workgroup norms that guide employee behavior. These norms can develop as the result of written policies that place sanctions on inappropriate organizational behavior (Schein, 1990). For example, some organizations have written policies that prohibit romantic relationships between supervisors and subordinates or between employees who work in the same department, whereas others do not have written workplace romance policies (SHRM, 1998, 2002). Written policies that impose restrictions on who can and cannot become romantically involved with one another can foster the development of workgroup norms regarding appropriate and inappropriate romantic organizational behavior. Nonetheless, workplace romance participants often attempt to keep

their relationships confidential (Mainiero, 1993). With regard to social consensus, any deliberate norm violation that breaches the stipulations of a written organizational policy is apt to be perceived by observers as ethically inappropriate and hence deserving of punishment (Foley & Powell, 1999; Trevino, 1992). We tested the following:

Hypothesis 5. Raters will perceive the accused's social–sexual behavior as more immoral if it is the result of a hierarchical romance that occurred in an organization that had as opposed to did not have a written policy prohibiting workplace romances.

Type of sexually harassing behavior

Hostile work environment harassment includes behaviors such as unwanted sexual attention and gender-based joking. In contrast, quid pro quo harassment entails implicit or explicit threats or promises regarding job-related outcomes that are contingent upon sexual cooperation, and examples include sexual bribery and coercion (Gelfand et al., 1995). With regard to the magnitude of consequences, quid pro quo forms of harassment are perceived as more deliberate and severe than hostile environment forms of harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). When individuals attribute responsibility for employee misconduct at work and, subsequently, have to make decisions regarding appropriate punishment, they take into account whether the behavior was deliberate and whether it involved coercing other employees (Trevino, 1992). If the misconduct under scrutiny is harmful and perceived as intentional or coercive, which would be the case for quid pro quo more so than hostile environment harassment, the decision maker is more apt to assign responsibility to and prefer to punish (in this example) the harasser as opposed to the harassee. Furthermore, any harmful misconduct at work that involves intentionally crossing ethical boundaries should be perceived as immoral. We tested the following:

Hypothesis 6. Raters will perceive the accused's social–sexual behavior as more immoral if it is the result of a hierarchical workplace romance that fostered quid pro quo as opposed to hostile environment harassing behavior.

Based on the first and second stages in Jones' (1991) model, observers' degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as a moral issue should predict their judgments of responsibility for the harassment. Specifically, if observers recognize the accused's behavior as immoral, their judgments should reflect this immorality via increased attributions of his responsibility for the harassment. We tested the following:

Hypothesis 7. Compared to raters who do not recognize the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral, raters who do recognize his behavior as immoral will attribute more responsibility to the accused and less responsibility to the complainant.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 258 SHRM members from 10 chapters located throughout the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Northwest regions of the US. Demographics of the participants are as follows: 22% men; 94% whites, 2% Latinos, and 2% African Americans; 22% single, 66% married, and 11% divorced. Age of participants ranged from 19 to 60 years ($M [SD] = 41.3 [9.2]$), tenure in their organization ranged from 1 to 29 years ($M [SD] = 6.1 [5.9]$ years), and 96% were employed full time. A MANOVA indicated that participants' SHRM chapter, sex, ethnicity, marital status, and employment status did not yield main or interactive effects on their degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral, attributions of responsibility, or recommended personnel actions ($ps > .05$). Moreover, participants' age and tenure in the organization did not correlate with their degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral or recommended actions ($ps > .05$).

Design and procedure

The same type of questionnaire that was used in Experiment 1 was administered to and collected from 258 SHRM members during one of their monthly chapter meetings. Participation in the study was voluntary and responses were made anonymously. Representative examples of respondents' job titles include human resource (HR) officer/specialist, HR manager/director, employee relations supervisor, training and development director, executive director, vice president, general manager, and chief executive officer. Many of these study participants are likely to have experience with responding to actual sexual harassment complaints.

Each participant read a vignette that depicted two employees, Keith and Sara, who were previously involved for three years in either a nonextramarital (both Keith and Sara were single) or extramarital (both Keith and Sara were married to someone else) direct-reporting hierarchical workplace romance (Keith was Sara's supervisor). In addition, Keith and Sara were well aware of the fact that their company either did not have or had a written policy prohibiting workplace romances. The vignette indicated that a few weeks after their romance was mutually terminated, Sara accused Keith of sexually harassing her at work and reported her complaint to upper-level management. Sara's complaint was either (a) that even after being repeatedly asked to stop, Keith

persisted in rubbing her neck and shoulders at work and telling her sexual jokes that she found offensive (hostile work environment); or (b) Keith informed her that her employment would be terminated unless she continued to have a romantic relationship with him (*quid pro quo*).

In sum, each participant was randomly assigned to read one of eight vignettes in a 2 (illicitness of workplace romance: nonextramarital vs. extramarital) \times 2 (presence of a workplace romance policy: no policy vs. policy) \times 2 (type of sexually harassing behavior: hostile work environment vs. *quid pro quo*) between-subjects experiment.

Measures

Manipulation checks. On a separate page prior to the measures of our study variables, we used three items to assess whether illicitness of the romance, presence of a romance policy, and type of harassing behavior were manipulated successfully. We used three additional items to determine whether participants accurately perceived background information presented in the vignette.

Recognition of social–sexual behavior as immoral. Participants rated the degree to which they considered the accused’s social–sexual behavior to be unethical and, thus, constituting a moral issue. We used the following items: “Keith’s behavior with Sara is unethical” and “Keith’s behavior with Sara is immoral” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; items from Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999, who reported a Cronbach’s α of .75). With regard to evidence for convergent and discriminant validity, observers’ recognition of social–sexual behavior at work as immoral correlates positively with their perceived moral intensity of, and intentions to intervene in, the social–sexual behavior. Observers’ recognition of the behavior as immoral does not, however, correlate with a measure of the extent to which they provide socially desirable responses (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999).

Attributions of responsibility. Participants indicated their agreement with the same 18 statements describing potential reasons for Sara’s complaint that we used in Experiment 1.

Personnel actions. Participants rated the appropriateness of the same 13 personnel actions that we used in Experiment 1.

Perception of sexual harassment. As a control variable, participants rated the degree to which they perceived the accused’s behavior as constituting sexual harassment. We used the following items: “Keith’s behavior with Sara is an act of sexual harassment” and “Keith’s behavior with Sara is sexually harassing despite the fact that they were previously involved with one another in a romantic relationship” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We measured this control variable to determine whether

raters’ perceptions of the accused’s sexually harassing behavior were confounded with the manipulation of our independent variables.

Results and discussion

Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for all variables in Experiment 2. With respect to evidence for convergent validity, raters’ perceptions of the sexual harassment are positively correlated with their recognition of the accused’s social–sexual behavior as immoral, judgments of the accused, and recommended actions of counseling and discipline. In addition, raters’ perceptions of the sexual harassment are negatively correlated with their judgments of the complainant and recommended action of ignore/drop issue.

Manipulation checks

One hundred percent of the participants accurately reported the illicitness of Keith and Sara’s romance, 99% accurately reported whether there was a workplace romance policy, and 100% accurately reported the type of harassing behavior. The three independent variables were thus manipulated successfully. Also, 100% of the participants correctly indicated where Keith and Sara were employed, 99% correctly indicated that Keith and Sara had been dating for three years, and 100% correctly indicated that Keith and Sara’s professional relationship was direct reporting.

Test of a hypothesized model

To test Hypothesis 3 and Hypotheses 4–7, we examined a single-indicator, path-analytic model that specified (a) illicitness of the romance (nonextramarital vs. extramarital), presence of a romance policy (no policy vs. policy), and type of harassing behavior (hostile work environment vs. *quid pro quo*) as having direct effects on raters’ degree of recognition of the accused’s social–sexual behavior as immoral; (b) raters’ degree of recognition of the accused’s behavior as immoral as a predictor of their attributions of responsibility for the harassment; and (c) raters’ attributions of responsibility as a predictor of each of the four personnel actions (see Fig. 2).

In support of Hypothesis 4, there was a main effect of illicitness of the workplace romance on raters’ degree of recognition of the accused’s behavior as immoral ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$). As expected, the means shown in Table 4 indicate that his behavior was perceived as more immoral when the dissolved romance was extramarital ($M = 5.02$) as opposed to nonextramarital ($M = 4.55$).

In support of Hypothesis 5, there was a main effect of presence of a workplace romance policy on raters’ degree of recognition of the accused’s behavior as immoral ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). As expected, the means shown in

Table 3
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for independent^a, mediator^{b,c}, outcome^d, and control^e variables in Experiment 2

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Romance and harassment characteristics ^a													
1. Illicitness of romance	1.49	0.50	—										
2. Presence of romance policy	1.48	0.50	.01	—									
3. Type of harassing behavior	1.48	0.50	-.03	-.08	—								
Recognition of moral issue ^b													
4. Recognition of accused's behavior as immoral	4.78	1.44	.16*	.15*	.10	(.71)							
Attributions of responsibility ^c													
5. Judgment of accused	4.34	0.89	.11	-.04	-.14*	.38*	(.80)						
6. Judgment of complainant	3.28	1.02	.03	-.01	.12	-.19*	-.25*	(.86)					
Personnel actions ^d													
7. No action (ignore/drop issue)	1.15	0.52	.17*	.16*	.04	.03	-.12	.19*	(.80)				
8. Remedial action (social support)	2.32	1.74	-.04	.04	-.09	.08	.07	.02	.14*	(.90)			
9. Remedial action (counseling)	4.17	2.25	.04	-.01	.03	.20*	.16*	-.20*	.02	.24*	(.98)		
10. Punitive action (discipline)	2.61	1.33	.07	.11	.00	.42*	.33*	-.27*	.05	.33*	.32*	(.78)	
Control variable ^e													
11. Perception of harassment	5.37	1.44	.07	.04	.03	.36*	.45*	-.51*	-.19*	.04	.23*	.36*	(.88)

Note. *N* ranged from 248 to 258. Cronbach's *α*s are in parentheses on the main diagonal.

^a Illicitness of the workplace romance was coded 1 = *nonextramarital* and 2 = *extramarital*; presence of a workplace romance policy was coded 1 = *no policy* and 2 = *policy*; type of sexually harassing behavior was coded 1 = *hostile work environment* and 2 = *quid pro quo*.

^b Greater scores indicate that the accused's behavior was perceived as immoral.

^c Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as responsible for the harassing behavior.

^d Greater scores indicate that the personnel action was considered appropriate.

^e Greater scores indicate that the accused's behavior was perceived as constituting sexual harassment.

* $p < .05$.

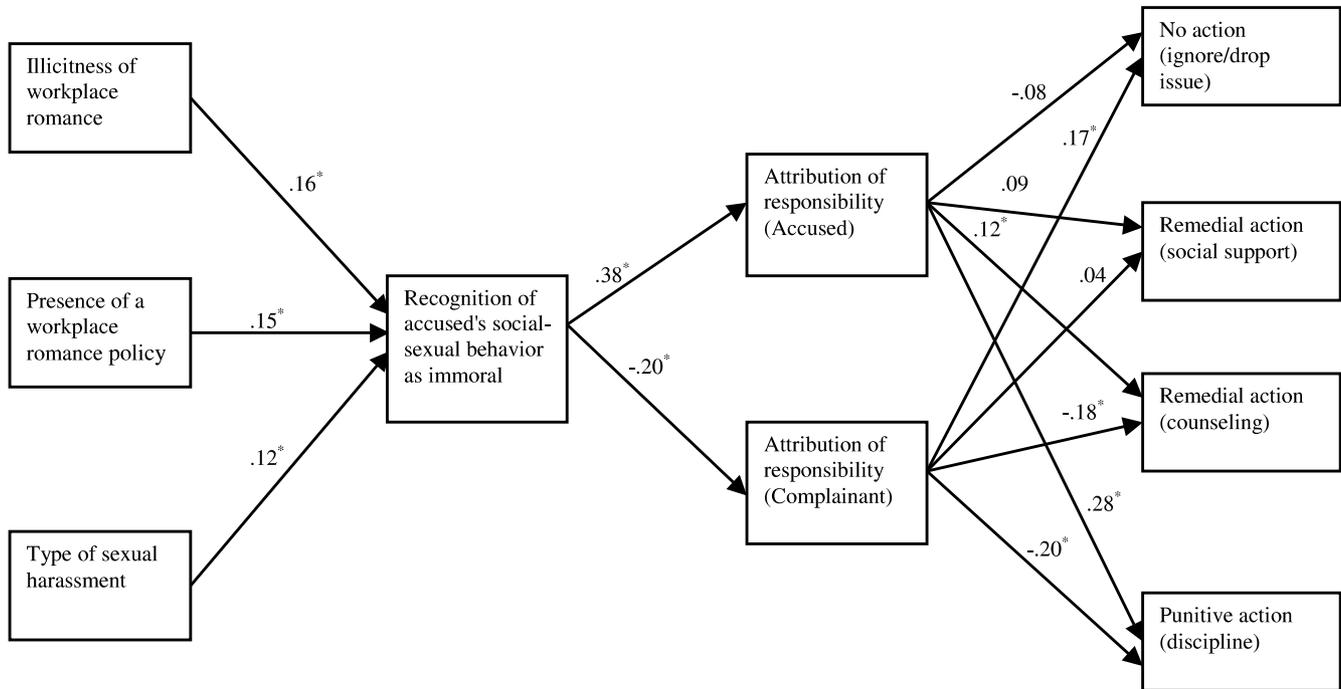


Fig. 2. Completely standardized path-analytic solution for independent, mediator, and outcome variables in Experiment 2. Each endogenous variable was modeled with an error term. * $p < .05$.

Table 4 indicate that his behavior was perceived as more immoral when it occurred in an organization that had ($M = 5.00$) as opposed to did not have ($M = 4.57$) a written policy prohibiting workplace romances.

In support of Hypothesis 6, there was a main effect of type of sexually harassing behavior on raters' degree of recognition of the accused's behavior as immoral ($\beta = .12, p < .05$). As expected, the means shown in

Table 4 Means and standard deviations for mediator^{a,b}, outcome^c, and control^d variables in Experiment 2 by illicitness of workplace romance, presence of a workplace romance policy, and type of sexually harassing behavior

Variable	Illicitness of romance				Romance policy				Type of harassment			
	Nonextramarital		Extramarital		No policy		Policy		HWE		QPQ	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Recognition of moral issue ^a												
1. Recognition of accused's behavior as immoral	4.55 ^e	1.43	5.02 ^e	1.42	4.57 ^f	1.51	5.00 ^f	1.34	4.64 ^g	1.42	4.93 ^g	1.45
Attributions of responsibility ^b												
2. Judgment of accused	4.24	0.83	4.44	0.93	4.37	0.95	4.31	0.81	4.46 ^h	0.90	4.22 ^h	0.85
3. Judgment of complainant	3.25	0.95	3.30	1.09	3.28	1.05	3.27	0.98	3.16 ⁱ	0.99	3.40 ⁱ	1.04
Personnel actions ^c												
4. No action (ignore/drop issue)	1.06 ^j	0.24	1.24 ^j	0.69	1.07 ^k	0.34	1.23 ^k	0.66	1.13	0.45	1.17	0.59
5. Remedial action (social support)	2.39	1.70	2.24	1.79	2.25	1.74	2.39	1.76	2.46	1.83	2.16	1.65
6. Remedial action (counseling)	4.09	2.24	4.25	2.26	4.19	2.22	4.14	2.29	4.11	2.22	4.24	2.28
7. Punitive action (discipline)	2.52	1.35	2.70	1.31	2.46 ^l	1.28	2.76 ^l	1.38	2.61	1.14	2.60	1.51
Control variable ^d												
8. Perception of harassment	5.27	1.50	5.47	1.37	5.31	1.45	5.43	1.44	5.33	1.35	5.41	1.54

Note. N ranged from 248 to 255. HWE, hostile work environment; QPQ, quid pro quo.

^a Greater scores indicate that the accused's behavior was perceived as immoral.

^b Greater scores indicate that the individual was judged as responsible for the harassing behavior.

^c Greater scores indicate that the personnel action was considered appropriate.

^d Greater scores indicate that the accused's behavior was perceived as constituting sexual harassment. Means with the same superscript differ from one another at $p < .05$.

^{e-l} Means with the same superscript differ from one another at $p < .05$.

Table 4 indicate that his behavior was perceived as more immoral when it was quid pro quo ($M = 4.93$) as opposed to hostile environment ($M = 4.64$) harassment.

In support of Hypothesis 7, raters' degree of recognition of the accused's behavior as immoral predicted their attribution of responsibility for the accused ($\beta = .38$, $p < .05$) and for the complainant ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .05$). As expected, raters who perceived the accused's behavior as immoral judged him as more responsible, and the complainant as less responsible, compared to raters who did not perceive the accused's behavior as immoral.

In support of Hypothesis 3, raters' attribution of responsibility for the accused predicted their recommended actions of counseling ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) and discipline ($\beta = .28$, $p < .05$). Also in support of Hypothesis 3, raters' attribution of responsibility for the complainant predicted their recommended actions of ignore/drop issue ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), counseling ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$), and discipline ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .05$). In replication of results from Experiment 1, (a) raters who judged the accused as responsible for the harassment reported that it was more appropriate to discipline him compared to raters who did not judge the accused as responsible; and (b) raters who judged the complainant as responsible reported that it was more appropriate to ignore/drop the issue, and less appropriate to provide counseling, compared to raters who did not judge the complainant as responsible.

Results of our path analysis support the fit of the model shown in Fig. 2 (CFI and IFI = .98, NFI = .97, RFI = .96, RMSEA = .12, TLI = .97). The R^2 for this model was .47, whereby the R^2 was .23 for the personnel actions, .18 for attributions of responsibility, and .06 for degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral.

Tests of two alternative models

We examined two single-indicator, path-analytic models that specified the same paths as those depicted in Fig. 2. In the first alternative model, we included additional paths that specified illicitness of the romance, presence of a romance policy, and type of harassing behavior as having direct effects on raters' attributions of responsibility and each of the personnel actions. All of the statistically significant paths in our hypothesized model remained significant in this first alternative model. Above and beyond the significant paths shown in Fig. 2, this alternative model revealed the following significant paths: illicitness of the romance had a direct effect on the action of ignore/drop issue ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), presence of a romance policy had a direct effect on the actions of ignore/drop issue ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$) and discipline ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), and type of harassment had a direct effect on judgment of the accused ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .05$) and judgment of the complainant ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$). With the exception of the direct path from presence of a romance

policy to discipline, these results are in the opposite direction as one might expect (see means in Table 4). Although this first alternative model has acceptable fit indices (CFI and IFI = .99, NFI = .98, RFI = .93, RMSEA = .15, TLI = .94), the model shown in Fig. 2 provides a significantly improved fit ($\chi^2_{\text{diff}}[18, N = 258] = 46.27$, $p < .05$).

In the second alternative model, we specified the same paths as in the first alternative model. However, we included additional paths that specified raters' recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral as having a direct effect on each of the personnel actions. All of the statistically significant paths in our first alternative model remained significant in this second alternative model. Above and beyond the significant paths in the first alternative model, this second alternative model revealed the following significant paths: recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral had a direct effect on the actions of counseling ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) and discipline ($\beta = .31$, $p < .05$). Although this second alternative model has acceptable fit indices (CFI, IFI, and NFI = .99, RFI = .93, RMSEA = .15, TLI = .94), the model shown in Fig. 2 provides a significantly improved fit ($\chi^2_{\text{diff}}[22, N = 258] = 74.02$, $p < .05$). In sum, results of testing these two alternative models confirm the mediating role of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral and attributions of responsibility as depicted in Fig. 2.

Perception of sexual harassment as a control variable

We measured raters' perceptions of whether the accused's behavior constitutes sexual harassment to determine if they were confounded with our manipulations. Overall, raters perceived Keith's behavior as constituting sexual harassment ($M = 5.4$, $Mdn = 6$, $Mode = 7$, $SD = 1.4$). Indeed, 92% of the respondents had mean scores that were at or above the scale's midpoint. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that illicitness of the romance, presence of a romance policy, type of harassing behavior, and rater sex did not yield main or interactive effects on raters' perceptions of whether Keith's behavior constitutes sexual harassment ($ps > .05$). Furthermore, even when controlling for raters' perceptions of whether Keith's behavior constitutes sexual harassment, illicitness of the romance and presence of a romance policy correlated with raters' recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral (partial $r_s = .14$ and $.16$, respectively, $ps < .05$). In short, across all conditions, male and female raters perceived the accused's behavior as constituting harassment and yet they still varied in terms of their recognition of his social–sexual behavior as immoral, attributions of responsibility, and recommendations about personnel actions.

In summary, consistent with Jones' (1991) framework, results reveal that (a) raters' degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral me-

diates the link between their knowledge of features of the dissolved romance, romance policy, and harassing behavior and their attributions of responsibility for the harassment; and (b) raters' attributions of responsibility, in turn, predict their recommendations about the appropriateness of various personnel actions.

General discussion

Observers' knowledge of a prior history of workplace romance and knowledge of features of a dissolved workplace romance affect their responses to an ensuing sexual harassment complaint (Pierce et al., 2000; Summers & Myklebust, 1992). What lacks from this prior research is a theoretical foundation from which to interpret the findings. The aim of the present research was to use Jones' (1991) ethical decision-making framework to explain how features of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance and sexually harassing behavior affect observers' responses to an ensuing harassment complaint. Results from both experiments are consistent with Jones' (1991) framework. Altogether, our results are the first to reveal that observers' degree of recognition of a dissolved workplace romance/sexual harassment scenario as an ethical issue predicts their judgments about the issue which, in turn, predict their recommendations about appropriate personnel actions.

Implications for theory and future research

Pierce et al. (2000) speculated that investigators of harassment complaints have schemas for what they consider to be genuine and thus appropriate workplace romances. According to Pierce et al., these workplace romance schemas may be activated when raters are presented with the task of responding to a sexual harassment complaint that stems from a prior workplace romance. Pierce et al. further speculated that, with respect to an underlying social-cognitive process, raters may progress through stages of decision making that are affected by the activation of their workplace romance schemas. Our experiments provide support for Pierce et al.'s proposition with the following three caveats: First, their notion of a "workplace romance schema" is perhaps better conceptualized as an "ethics schema"; second, this ethics schema may be broader and include both workplace romance and sexual harassment as exhibits of social-sexual behavior at work; third, their proposed decision-making steps are perhaps better conceptualized using Jones' (1991) issue-contingent model of ethical decision making in organizations.

If investigators of sexual harassment complaints have ethics schemas and progress through the stages of decision making described by Jones (1991), the underlying

social-cognitive process through which they set different standards for determining acceptable social-sexual behavior becomes more clear. Setting different tolerance standards may be the result of observers perceiving contextual features of the dissolved workplace romance/sexual harassment scenario as having various degrees of moral intensity. For instance, consider results from Experiment 2 shown in Fig. 2. The greater the degree to which raters recognized the accused's social-sexual behavior as immoral, the more likely it was that they attributed responsibility to him and, in turn, recommended that a punitive action (i.e., discipline) be taken toward him. Collectively, our results suggest that observers who do not recognize a dissolved workplace romance/sexual harassment scenario as immoral may be more tolerant of the harassing behavior as manifested by the nature of their judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions.

Where do we go from here? We suggest that researchers continue to examine dissolved workplace romances and sexual harassment complaints from an ethical decision-making perspective. For example, drawing from Trevino (1986) and Bowes-Sperry and Powell (1999), we suspect that contextual features such as the illicitness of a workplace romance are not the only sources of variance in observers' degree of recognition of the social-sexual behavior as immoral. Raters' ethical ideologies, or tendencies to make moral judgments along the dimensions of relativism and idealism, may also affect their recognition of behavior as an ethical issue. If so, what role do raters' ethical ideologies play in relation to their knowledge of features of a dissolved workplace romance and sexually harassing behavior when responding to a harassment complaint? Can raters' ethical ideologies be affected by factors such as whether they themselves have a prior history of workplace romance and/or a history of being the target of sexual harassment?

Researchers could also examine additional features of dissolved workplace romances and subsequent harassing behavior that have yet to be examined from an ethical decision-making perspective. Drawing from Rest (1986), Jones (1991), and Barnett (2001), perceived moral intensity can be a function of dimensions other than magnitude of consequences and social consensus. For example, proximity, or a raters' feeling of closeness to the beneficiaries or victims of an act, is another component of moral intensity. Thus, how would managers respond to a sexual harassment complaint that stemmed from a dissolved workplace romance that occurred inside (proximate) versus outside (not proximate) their unit within the organization? Pursuing these avenues of research will help to gain a better understanding of the implicit effects of dissolved workplace romances on observers' responses to sexual harassment complaints.

Implications for training and development programs

Individuals who conduct training and development programs should consider framing both workplace romance and sexual harassment as ethical issues (cf. Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999; O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). If investigators of harassment complaints could learn to recognize dissolved workplace romance/sexual harassment scenarios as an ethical issue, they may be less tolerant of the harassing behavior as exhibited by the nature of their responses to the incrimination.

We would also like to echo a concern raised by Pierce et al. (2000). Across levels of our manipulated factors, disciplining the accused was rated as a less appropriate personnel action than counseling. If our results are generalizable to other natural settings, it is conceivable that employees who harass a former workplace romance partner may not be recommended for punitive action, which could suggest to others that harassing behavior does not have sufficiently harsh consequences. Training and development programs should consider informing employees about such risks that may accompany partaking in a workplace romance.

Limitations

Two potential limitations are the generalizability of our results and the use of written vignettes. With respect to generalizability, the fact that we assessed typical, pervasive, and yet hypothetical patterns of organizational behavior should be considered. For example, it is possible that different gender pairings within hierarchical relationships would result in different responses than the male supervisor–female subordinate scenarios used herein. When considering the organizational and perhaps legal ramifications, it is also possible that investigators' responses to actual harassment complaints would be less assertive than their responses to hypothetical complaints. Finally, some may question whether our results generalize to sexual harassment complaints that occur absent a prior workplace romance. They may not because of a serious methodological limitation. Unfortunately, we only measured observers' recognition of the accused's, but not the complainant's, "social–sexual behavior" as immoral. Consequently, we cannot determine the extent to which observers recognized the complainant's romantic behavior as immoral and, moreover, we cannot distinguish the accused's romantic behavior from his harassing behavior. In future studies, to tease apart the romance from the harassment, we urge researchers to measure the degree to which observers recognize (a) the accused's as well as the complainant's romantic behavior as immoral; and (b) the accused's harassing behavior as immoral.

With respect to written vignettes, it has been argued that sexual harassment research relies too heavily on

their use, especially with college student samples (Lengnick-Hall, 1995). However, the use of written vignettes enabled us to hold constant several contextual factors (e.g., presence of conflicting evidence) while manipulating and isolating the effects of our independent variables. Furthermore, in contrast to much of the vignette-based research on sexual harassment, we did not have study participants assume the role of a harasser. Instead, participants were observers and evaluators of the situation as they may be in a natural setting. And unlike much of the experimental research on sexual harassment, we did not use college students as study participants. Instead, we used employees from several different organizations who, especially those in Experiment 2, have probably had actual experience with judging responsibility and recommending actions for employee misconduct at work. Because participants in Experiment 2 were primarily human resource professionals, they may have been sufficiently trained and experienced to know that both hostile work environment and quid pro quo constitute sexually harassing behavior. If so, this would explain why results from Experiment 2 revealed that, across all conditions, male and female raters perceived the accused's behavior as constituting harassment. Finally, it deserves reiterating that outcomes of a few recent federal court cases suggest that sexual harassment claims filed as a result of a dissolved workplace romance are not always upheld. The outcome may depend, in part, on whether the harassing behavior was a function of gender discrimination as opposed to merely a personal animosity arising from the dissolved romance. In future studies, researchers should consider using vignettes which portray more explicitly that the perpetrator's harassing behavior is discrimination based on the target's gender and not just a personal animosity stemming from the dissolved romance.

Conclusion

We introduced and provided support for an ethical decision-making framework as an explanation for the social–cognitive process through which observers make decisions about a sexual harassment complaint that stems from a prior workplace romance. The present research reveals that features of a dissolved hierarchical workplace romance, and subsequent sexually harassing behavior, affect observers' degree of recognition of the accused's social–sexual behavior as immoral which, in turn, predicts their attributions of responsibility for the harassment which, in turn, predict their recommendations about the appropriateness of various personnel actions. In closing, this article provides a theoretical foundation from which to understand how observers' judgments of responsibility and recommended personnel actions regarding a sexual harassment complaint are

influenced by a previously dissolved workplace romance.

References

- Arbuckle, J. L., & Wothke, W. (1999). *Amos 4.0 user's guide*. Chicago: SmallWaters.
- Barnett, T. (2001). Dimensions of moral intensity and ethical decision making: An empirical study. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 31*, 1038–1057.
- Bowes-Sperry, L., & Powell, G. N. (1999). Observers' reactions to social-sexual behavior at work: An ethical decision making perspective. *Journal of Management, 25*, 779–802.
- Brown, T. J., & Allgeier, E. R. (1995). Managers' perceptions of workplace romances: An interview study. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 10*, 169–176.
- Brown, T. J., & Allgeier, E. R. (1996). The impact of participant characteristics, perceived motives, and job behaviors on co-workers' evaluations of workplace romances. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26*, 577–595.
- Bureau of National Affairs (BNA). (1988). Corporate affairs: Nepotism, office romance, & sexual harassment. Washington, DC: BNA.
- Dillard, J. P. (1987). Close relationships at work: Perceptions of the motives and performance of relational participants. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 4*, 179–193.
- Dillard, J. P., & Broetzmann, S. M. (1989). Romantic relationships at work: Perceived changes in job-related behaviors as a function of participant's motive, partner's motive, and gender. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 19*, 93–110.
- Dillard, J. P., Hale, J. L., & Segrin, C. (1994). Close relationships in task environments: Perceptions of relational types, illicitness, and power. *Management Communication Quarterly, 7*, 227–255.
- Fitzgerald, L. F., Gelfand, M. J., & Drasgow, F. (1995). Measuring sexual harassment: Theoretical and psychometric advances. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 17*, 425–445.
- Foley, S., & Powell, G. N. (1999). Not all is fair in love and work: Coworkers' preferences for and responses to managerial interventions regarding workplace romances. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 20*, 1043–1056.
- Gelfand, M. J., Fitzgerald, L. F., & Drasgow, F. (1995). The structure of sexual harassment: A confirmatory analysis across cultures and settings. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 47*, 164–177.
- Grandquest v. Mobile Pulley & Machine Works. (2001). 163 F. Supp. 2d 1338 (S.D. Al.).
- Gutek, B. A. (1985). *Sex and the workplace: The impact of sexual behavior and harassment on women, men, and organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gutek, B. A., Cohen, A. G., & Konrad, A. M. (1990). Predicting social-sexual behavior at work: A contact hypothesis. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*, 560–577.
- Henry, D. (1995). Wanna date? The office may not be the place. *HR Focus, 72*(4), 14.
- Jones, G. E. (1999). Hierarchical workplace romance: An experimental examination of team member perceptions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 20*, 1057–1072.
- Jones, T. M. (1991). Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Review, 16*, 366–395.
- Jones v. Keith. (2002). No.00-2741, US Dist. LEXIS 3365 (D. Mn. Feb. 25, 2002).
- Lengnick-Hall, M. L. (1995). Sexual harassment research: A methodological critique. *Personnel Psychology, 48*, 841–864.
- Mainiero, L. A. (1986). A review and analysis of power dynamics in organizational romances. *Academy of Management Review, 11*, 750–762.
- Mainiero, L. A. (1993). Dangerous liaisons? A review of current issues concerning male and female romantic relationships in the workplace. In E. A. Fagenson (Ed.), *Women in management: Trends, issues, and challenges in managerial diversity* (pp. 162–185). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McDonough v. Smith. (2001). 270 B.R. 544 (D. Ma.).
- O'Leary-Kelly, A. M., & Bowes-Sperry, L. (2001). Sexual harassment as unethical behavior: The role of moral intensity. *Human Resource Management Review, 11*, 73–92.
- Pierce, C. A. (1998). Factors associated with participating in a romantic relationship in a work environment. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 28*, 1712–1730.
- Pierce, C. A., & Aguinis, H. (1997). Bridging the gap between romantic relationships and sexual harassment in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 18*, 197–200.
- Pierce, C. A., & Aguinis, H. (2001). A framework for investigating the link between workplace romance and sexual harassment. *Group and Organization Management, 26*, 206–229.
- Pierce, C. A., & Aguinis, H. (2003). Romantic relationships in organizations: A test of a model of formation and impact factors. *Management Research, 1*, 161–169.
- Pierce, C. A., Aguinis, H., & Adams, S. K. R. (2000). Effects of a dissolved workplace romance and rater characteristics on responses to a sexual harassment accusation. *Academy of Management Journal, 43*, 869–880.
- Pierce, C. A., Byrne, D., & Aguinis, H. (1996). Attraction in organizations: A model of workplace romance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 17*, 5–32.
- Pipkins v. City of Temple Terrace, Fl., (2001). 267 F.3d 1197 (11th Cir. 2001).
- Powell, G. N. (2001). Workplace romances between senior-level executives and lower-level employees: An issue of work disruption and gender. *Human Relations, 54*, 1519–1544.
- Powell, G. N., & Foley, S. (1998). Something to talk about: Romantic relationships in organizational settings. *Journal of Management, 24*, 421–448.
- Quinn, R. E. (1977). Coping with cupid: The formation, impact, and management of romantic relationships in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 22*, 30–45.
- Rest, J. R. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory*. New York: Praeger.
- Schein, E. H. (1990). Organizational culture. *American Psychologist, 45*, 109–119.
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). (1998). *Workplace romance survey* (Item no. 62.17014). Alexandria, VA: SHRM Public Affairs Department.
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). (2002). *Workplace romance survey*. Alexandria, VA: SHRM Public Affairs Department.
- Succar v. Dade County School Board. (2000). 229 F.3d 1343 (11th Cir. 2000).
- Summers, R. J. (1991). Determinants of judgments of and responses to a complaint of sexual harassment. *Sex Roles, 25*, 379–392.
- Summers, R. J. (1996). Effect of harasser performance status and complainant tolerance on reactions to a complaint of sexual harassment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 49*, 53–67.
- Summers, R. J., & Myklebust, K. (1992). The influence of a history of romance on judgments and responses to a complaint of sexual harassment. *Sex Roles, 27*, 345–357.
- Terpstra, D. E., & Baker, D. D. (1992). Outcomes of federal court decisions on sexual harassment. *Academy of Management Journal, 35*, 181–190.
- Trevino, L. K. (1986). Ethical decision making in organizations: A person-situation interactionist model. *Academy of Management Review, 11*, 601–617.
- Trevino, L. K. (1992). The social effects of punishment in organizations: A justice perspective. *Academy of Management Review, 17*, 647–676.

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1993). Proposed guidelines on harassment based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age or disability. *Federal Register* 58, 5126–5129.

US Merit Systems Protection Board (1994). Sexual harassment in the federal workplace: Trends, progress, and continuing challenges. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.