ED 374 491 CS 508 702

AUTHOR Keyton, Joann

TITLE Examining Flirting in Social and Work Contexts: Are

There Implications for Harassment?

PUB DATE Nov 93

NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the

Speech Communication Association (79th, Miami Beach,

FL. November 18-21, 1993).

PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports -

Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS College Students; Higher Education; *Interpersonal

Communication; *Organizational Communication; Sex Differences; *Sexual Harassment; *Social Environment;

*Work Environment

IDENTIFIERS *Flirting; Message Responses; Superior Subordinate

Relationship

ABSTRACT

Based upon B. M. Montgomery's operationalization of flirting, a study tested flirting behaviors and interpretations of those behaviors in two contexts--social and work. Subjects were 27 students at a medium size southern private university, 43 nonstudent full-time employees from the same geographical area, 22 students in a large midwestern public university, 30 students at a midsouth public university, and 51 nonstudent, full-time employees from the same geographical region. Subjects completed a questionnaire concerning flirting behaviors and flirting interpretation items. Results indicated that sex did not account for differences on either scale in either context. The behavioral cues of flirting did not appear to be confined to flirting interaction, thus creating an ambiguous interpretation of the interaction. Knowing the flirting target predicted flirting behavior in the work context while having a romantic/sexual interest in the target predicted flirting in the social context. Findings suggest that flirting in the work setting does occur and that most targets flirt back, but less than 40% of the flirters had a romantic/sexual interest in their targets. The game playing motive of flirting in the work place has a bearing on the occurrence of sexually harassing behavior. (Contains 31 references, 1 figure, and 1 table of data.) (RS)



Examining Flirting in Social and Work Contexts:

Are There Implications for Harassment?

Joann Keyton, Ph.D. Assistant Professor

Memphis State University
Department of Theatre & Communication Arts
Memphis, TN 38152
901-678-3185
JKEYTON@MEMSTVX1

Based upon Montgomery's operationalization of flirting, this study tested flirting behaviors and interpretations of those behaviors in two contexts--social and work. Contrary to published reports of other cross-sex interaction, sex did not account for differences on either scale in either context. The behavioral cues of flirting do not appear to be confined to flirting interaction, thus creating an ambiguous interpretation of the interaction. Knowing the flirting target predicted flirting behavior in the work context while having a romantic/sexual interest in the target predicted flirting in the social context. These results indicate that flirting in the work setting does occur and that most targets flirt back, but that less than 40% of the flirters had a romantic/sexual interest in their targets. The game playing motive of flirting in the work place is discussed as having a bearing on the occurrence of sexually harassing behavior.

The author thanks Randy Hirokawa for his help in data collection.

U.S. Office o	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION f Educational Research and Improvement
	IONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
	CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating if
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS

J. Key. for

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) "



Examining Flirting in Social and Work Contexts:

Are There Implications for Harassment?

With recent national events, the media has drawn our attention to sexual harassment. And with that, our attention has been drawn to more general romantic interaction, such as flirting and sexual cor.tact in the work environment. A fine line distinguishes sexual harassment from flirting. Powell (1983) found that 71% of the women he surveyed had experienced flirting in the work place. While only 8% interpreted flirting as sexual harassment, many of the same behavioral elements were also used to describe sexual harassment. Rowland, Crisler, and Cox (1982) define flirting as brief, non-intimate form of sexual game-playing. "Flirting . . . might be viewed as a milder response to such pressures than sexual intimacy, yet one which lies along the same continuum" (p. 348) with sexual harassment. Flirting is a socially approved mechanism for people to get to know one another to initiate and develop relationships. It has positive social consequences. Sexual harassment, on the other hand, has negative social, professional, and legal consequences.

There is a logical extension from flirting to sexual harassment since many of the same behaviors (sexual comments, eye gaze, touch) are common to both. If those behaviors are interpreted as flirting in the social context, it is approved and encouraged. However, those same behaviors may not be welcomed at work and interpreted as harassment. This alternative interpretation of flirting is underscored with the recognition that "interpretations are not limited to romantic interactions. In fact, the greater portion of all relationships are outside the romantic realm" (Patzer, 1985, p. 96). Flirting as socially situated is a perfect test of the opportunity to build a romantic relationship. If the flirting is reciprocated, we judge it successful. Not reciprocated, we rationalize that we were "just flirting." While the intent of flirting might logically be seen as testing the parameters of a new or developing relationship, flirting can also function: (a) as play with persons who one believes to be unavailable for a romantic relationships, (b) as an exercise of power to test one's masculinity/femininity, or (c) as an exercise of power to receive something from someone else.



Sexualization of the Work Place

Recently, communication researchers have addressed sexual interaction in the work place with an issue of the <u>Journal of Applied Communication</u> devoted to sexual harassment. The editor, Julia Wood (1992), argues that

the language of male-female flirtation entails assumptions of an established social-intimate relationship, relatively equal partners who have choices about what to allow or not, and amorous or friendly feelings and motives. Such assumptions are sharply discordant with the dynamics of sexual harassment. (p. 353)

However, those who have been victims of sexual harassment imply that what developed into sexual harassment started as a more harmless version of male-female interaction: flirting (e.g., see Case #10, "Our Stories," 1992).

Gutek. Cohen, and Konrad (1990) argue that sexualization of the work place results as contact increases between the sexes in that setting. Sexualization of the work place is characterized by social-sexual behavior: "any non-work-related behavior having a sexual component; it includes sexual harassment, initiating dating, flirting and the like" (p. 560). Likewise, Taylor and Conrad (1992) argue that "interpretive and communicative practices sustain sexual harassment in organizations" (p. 404). They cite Stead (1985) and Cohen (1985) as evidence that "harassment is enabled by courtship and flirtation behaviors traditionally enacted during organizational socialization. While earlier research (Quinn, 1977; Uncertainty persisted, 1981; Gutek, Nakamura, Gahart, Handschumacher, & Russell, 1980; Schneider, 1984; Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982) reported that over half of all employees have been recipients of a sexual overture or comment from a co-worker of the other gender, Gutek et al. (1990) report that 76.5% of men and 77.6% of women surveyed had experienced nonharassing sexual behavior at work. In the work context, acceptance of flirting is dependent upon both interpersonal and organizational norms while sexual harassment has been legally defined.

Flirting

While flirting is frequently described as interpersonal communication and an important element in the interpersonal attraction and relational development literature, most academic writing on flirting



defines the interactions of flirting globally. As an example, Cozby and Rosenblatt (1972) identify flirting "as playing a game of attracting attention, either deliberately or unintentionally, with various sexual aspirations" (p. 10) without naming specific behaviors that comprise flirting. These authors argue that flirting is most effective when it is manifested as indirect nonverbal behaviors. Most research on flirting has been reduced to anecdotal data collection or a single question: "Did flirting occur?" leaving the respondent to provide his/her personal definition of such an act. A more contemporary view of flirting would question sexual aspirations as the sole motivator (Lieberman, 1972). Given cross-cultural acceptance of the phenomenon (Buunk & Hupka, 1987), it would seem that flirting could be initiated for a variety of reasons.

To ease the difficulty in operationalizing (Lieberman, 1972) this "most fascinating and theoretically relevant behavior . . . of the everyday variety" (Denfled, 1972), Montgomery (1989) studied flirting from the perspective of relationship development and interpersonal attraction—the assumed context of flirting—using grounded research techniques. Montgomery assumed that: 1) flirting had a behavioral component, 2) flirting was a communicative process, 3) meanings were underscored by themes of sexual affiliation, 4) flirting was done strategically, and 5) flirting implied subtle action and ambiguous intent. Montgomery (1989) sought to identify the verbal and nonverbal behaviors associated with flirtatious communication and meanings attached to those behaviors. Open ended data from both the initiator and target perspective resulted in nine specific, discrete behaviors (eight nonverbal behavioral cues, and one verbal behavioral cue) and six message themes of abstracted meanings attached to behaviors. These message themes can also be thought of as motives the flirter acts upon. These behaviors and interpretations are shown in Figure 1 in the rank order they were identified in Montgomery's (1989) study.

Figure 1 Here

The only other research that has sought to specifically identify flirting behavior is a study by Rowland, Crisler, and Cox (1982). In studying flirting between college students and faculty, the following were tested as flirting activities: being asked out on a date, intimate physical contact, humorous sexual



remarks, sustained eye contact, calling person at home, brief eye contact, brief physical contact, sustained physical contact, non-sexual humor, working together one-on-one, working together with others, and going out with others. Only the first four were identified as flirting by more than 50% of the participants.

Montgomery notes that the behaviors identified as flirting have also been associated with strategies for bringing about sexual intercourse as well as with the communication processes of affinity seeking, relationship maintenance, affinity testing, and conveying positive affect. "In general, these behaviors are prosocial, providing relational rewards through positive reinforcement. While people apparently rely on the behaviors within this broad prosocial category when they flirt, the diversity of subjects' descriptions suggests that flirting has no exclusive monopuly on any particular acts" (Montgomery, 1989, p. 21). She further comments on the ambiguous messages of flirting: "Two people may be communicating through flirting, but not interpreting it in the same way" ("Flirting can send," 1990, p. 9) which is the reason some targets interpret flirting as harassment.

From a linguistic viewpoint, Tannen (1990) posits that verbal flirting behavior is frequently based on paying attention to details of appearance. In brief exchanges, colleague A compliments colleague B on her new hair style. "The noticing of details shows caring and creates involvement" (Tannen, 1990, p. 115). Another example of nonverbal behavior taking precedent over verbal behavior in flirting occurs during a typical business conversation as colleague B touches A to brush lint off his lapel. This type of nonverbal interruption of verbal interaction may be an attempt to "steer the conversation in the direction of flirting" (Tannen, 1990, p. 214).

With respect to gender differences, Montgomery ("Flirting can send,"1990) acknowledges that men flirt differently than women as men are tuned into the physical aspects of the relationship while females look to establish friendships. Abbey (1982) found that "men are more likely to perceive the world in sexual terms and to make sexual judgments than women are. The predicted effect that men misperceive friendliness from women as seduction, appears to be merely one manifestation of this broader male sexual orientation" (p. 836-837). Similarly, Downey and Vitulli (1987) found that men show more interest in returning flirtation. Women may not return flirting behaviors if they interpret such



advances as harassment thus leading men to believe that that "flirting was less effective for them than did females" (Rowland, Crisler, and Cox,1982, p. 355). Other studies have shown that men tend to perceive friendliness from a woman as sexual interest (Saal et al., 1989; Shotland & Craig, 1988).

Flirting as Interpersonal Attraction

Interpersonal attraction is defined as "an individual's tendency or predisposition to evaluate another person . . . in a positive way" (Walter & Walster, 1976, p. 280). Certainly interpersonal attraction is a factor in choosing to flirt with someone, but the literature focuses on what attributes attract people to others (e.g., physical attractiveness, similarity of attitudes) with little consideration to the type of verbal and nonverbal communication one uses to test a potential partner's interest in having a romantic relationship or the communication one utilizes to move a relationship along the path of romantic involvement. This is where flirting plays a crucial part. Flirting may be the crucial first step in evaluating one's own interest in a potential relationship with the target. Verbal flirting allows one to test coorientation with the target while the other's responses to nonverbal flirting allows the sender to assess target receptivity of such activity. Flirting may be the first communication activity one engages in after identifying someone who is physically attractive to him/her. Flirting is not limited to initial interaction, however. Flirting can also occur after two people have developed a relationship or friendship. During the development of that relationship, they learn the intensity of similar attitudes or come to believe that the other person could deliver positive rewards. How flirting would enhance or inhibit relationship development at this stage has received little attention.

Beil and Buerkel-Rothfuss (1990) tested the types of strategies partners used to acquire information about the state of their relationship. One of these strategies, indirection suggestion,

entails the use of jokes, hints, and increased intimacy of touch to suggest implicitly that one is serious about the relationship. One might, for instance, make a humorous comment about the couple's future children, flirt with the partner, or become increasingly bold in touch. If the other party responds with laughter, flirtatious advances, or intimate touch, this can be taken as a sign that both parties desire escalation. (p. 65)



Their study of participants who were in a dating relationship failed to achieve significance in their hypothesis that courtship progress would be associated with less frequent use of indirect suggestion strategies. However, the researchers did find that when participants reported using indirect suggestion strategies, they did so deliberately.

Downey and Vitulii (1987) argue that there are two types of flirting giving researchers reason to explore this communication activity outside of its typical social context. One is used to "convey a message of interest or attraction" (p. 899) while the second implies "an existing casual relationship where one or both persons are engaged in maintaining some suggestion or expectation of intimacy without intentions of increasing its level or allowing some type of 'consummation'" (p. 899). The first type of flirting is most likely to occur in social situations while the second is most likely to occur at work. Work environments may be "safe" havens for flirting: there is the opportunity to interact flirtatiously with the opposite sex, but the environment itself provides a parameter that turns the flirting behavior into play behavior that should not be taken seriously. Thus, flirting could be seen as a game that is safe to play, particularly if the organization has a sexualized climate. Alternately, flirting can be used to lead a work relationship to a new arena for interaction and interpretation.

Research Questions

To date, flirting has been understudied with investigations confined to a single context and typically studied on traditional college age students. Given recent attention to sexual harassment, it is important to study flirting comparing contextual implications. While many definitions of flirting focus on social dynamics, we are naive to think that flirting occurs only in social context or that it is unwelcomed in the work context. "Many people meet future spouses, lovers, and friends at work. Sexual harassment is not the only kind of sexual interchange between the sexes at work" (Gutek, Morasch, & Cohen, 1983, p. 31). Organizations are closed environments in which employees routinely interact over a period of time allowing them to discover, the deeper, attractive aspects of one another (Murstein, 1970). As time together increases, interaction can become more informal which can lead to an increased incidence of flirting interaction (Quinn, 1977). If we believe the popular press (e.g., see "Is Your Office," 1991),



flirting in the work context is acceptable behavior and that despite the potential professional hazards . . . "work place romance is still flourishing" (Rapp, 1992, p. 58).

Using Montgomery's measures of flirting behavioral cues and interpretation of flirting behavior, the following research questions guide this inquiry.

RQ1: How do participant variables of sex and age affect differences in the use and interpretation of flirting interaction?

RQ2: How do target variables of knowing the target and having a romantic/sexual interest in the target affect differences in the use and interpretation of flirting interaction?

Methodology

Study Participants

To provide generalizability for the study, participants for the study were drawn from five populations. The first was a student population of a medium size southern private university (n=27); the second consisted of nonstudent, full-time employees from the same geographical area (n=43); the third was a student population of a large midwestern public university (n=22); the fourth was a student population of a midsouth public university (n=30); and the fifth consisted of nonstudent, full-time employees from the same geographic area as the fourth (n=51). All participants were employed part or full-time. The sample (=173) had slightly more females (51.8%) than males (48.2%). The average age for the sample was 26.541 with ages ranging from 18 to 60.

Targets

The age range for targets of participants' flirting behavior in social settings was 18 to 55; the range for targets in work settings was 17 to 55. All reports were of heterosexual relationships.

Questionnaire

Participants were asked to respond to Montgomery's nine flirting behaviors and six flirting interpretation items "thinking of the last time you flirted in a social setting," and "thinking of the last time you flirted in a work setting." A social setting was described as "with friends, a romantic partner, or while you were at a social or community club meeting." The work situation was described as interaction with



colleagues, co-workers, subordinates, or superiors. Participants responded to Likert-type scales using a zero to five to represent the range of "not using that behavior" to "using that behavior very much."

Results

Due to the exploratory nature of the measuring instrument, internal reliability coefficients were computed to determine if items could be summed. Chronbach's alpha for the social behaviors was .816 with all items having an item-to-total correlation above .3. Similarly, work behaviors achieved a Chronbach's alpha of .821 with all items having an item-to-total correlation above .3. Using the same criterion for the social interpretation items, the social scale achieved a .658 Chronbach's alpha. One item on the work interpretation scale (disinterested -- be hard to get, put person down), did not achieve the .3 cutoff and was eliminated from the work behavior scale. The remaining five items achieved a Chronbach's alpha of .691. Given the acceptable levels of internal consistency, the items were summed on the two scales. Means for the behavioral scale were: social, mean=26.953, sd 7.904; work, mean=20.097, sd 8.928. Means for the interpretation scale were: social, mean=13.506, sd 5.283; work, mean=10.768, sd 5.006. Item means and item-to-total correlations are displayed in Table 1.

Because participants for the study were drawn from several distinct geographical areas and from both student and non-student populations, geographical and student/non-student identifiers were tested for effects on the flirting subscales in both contexts. There were no significant effects.

Table 1 Here

In addition to the behavioral and interpretation subscales in both the social and work situations, participants were asked to describe both flirting experiences according to: 1) how well they knew the target, 2) if they had a romantic or sexual interest in the target, and 3) if the target flirted back. These variables provided contextual information for the flirting interaction. On Likert-type scales, participants acknowledged that they knew their flirting target somewhat better in the social (mean=3.129) than in the work (mean=2.669) setting. In terms of romantic interest, 75.46% reported a romantic or sexual interest in their social target while only 36.81% reported similar interest in their work flirting target. Participants



reported that their targets flirted back in both the social (94.7%) and work setting (77.3%). For these three contextual variables, participant sex did not produce significant effects.

To answer research question one, sex, age, and their interaction term were used as predictors for the behavioral and interpretation subscales in both contexts. For flirting behaviors in the social context, age was the significant main effect in the equation F=3.61, df 3,162, p=.015. Shared variance was quite small (.063). This same pattern existed across the remaining three tests. For flirting behaviors in the work context, age was the only significant term in the equation F=2.76, df 3,155, p=.044. Shared variance was .051. For the interpretation of flirting in the social context, age was the only significant term in the equation F=4.95, df 3,162, p=.003 with a shared variance of .084. For the interpretation of flirting in the work setting, age was the only significant term in the equation F=3.58, df 3,155, p=.015 with a shared variance of 065. Although significance was achieved in each equation, examination of the regression plots revealed that age produced a fairly flat line against the criterion variables.

Research question two tested the effect of knowing the target and having a romantic/sexual interest in the target as predictors for the behavioral and interpretation subscales in both contexts. For flirting behaviors in the social context, the equation F=3.10, df 3,163, p=.029 achieved significance, but without a main or interaction effect. For flirting behaviors in the work context, knowing the target was the significant main effect for the equation F=12.00, df 3,157, p=.001. Shared variance was .180. For the interpretation of flirting in the social context, all three terms (knowing, romantic interest, and interaction) contributed significance to the equation F=6.16, df 3,163, p=.003 with a shared variance of .108. Romantic interest accounted for the most variance followed by knowing and the interaction term. For the interpretation of flirting in the work setting, knowing was the only significant term in the equation F=6.43, df 3,156, p=.001 with a shared variance of .110.

In summary, age of the flirting perpetrator was related to the frequency of behavioral cues one uses in flirting interaction and to the number of interpretations one assigns to flirting interaction in both social and work contexts. There were no significant differences between males and females in either context. In terms of relational interest, romantic interest was the best predictor of the interpretation of



flirting interaction socially while knowing the flirting target predicted both flirting behaviors and the interpretation of flirting in the work place.

Discussion

Subtlety appears to be a key factor in determining what constitutes flirting. The high internal consistences of the behavioral scales indicate that several cues are used when one intends to flirt. While all behaviors and interpretations were reported as being used in social and work flirting experiences, a greater behavioral cue score in the social context indicates that participants reported using a greater variety or a stronger intensity of behaviors in the social setting. Recognition exists, however, that many socially approved behaviors which are not judged to be flirting fit these behavioral cue categories. Additional analysis is needed to determine if particular flirting behaviors cluster together (researcher's note: this is the next step in this researcher's continuing analysis of these data). If flirting is this ambiguous from the initiator's perspective, imagine the confusion targets must feel or the difficulty they might have in interpreting platonic friendly behavior from friendly behavior used as a prelude to more overt flirting.

The lower internal reliabilities for the interpretation scales raise the issue of multiple motives, or if Montgomery's measure captures motives or interpretations of flirting behavior accurately. This is especially true for examining flirting in the work context since her scale was developed under social interaction parameters. Rowland, Crisler, & Cox (1982) report that "undoubtedly, the particular context in which the behavior occurs is an important factor . . . it depends on the individual's motivation and expectations and not merely on the overt behavior that might be observed to occur" (p. 356). Their conclusion is echoed here.

An important distinction of these data is that there were no differences in flirting due to sex.

While others (see particularly Abbey, 1982) have found sex differences, most other studies have been confined to a sample within a narrow age range and to flirting in social settings. Although there were no sex differences in these results due to sex, the study was approached from the initiator's point of view.

From a receiver's point of view, Abbey and Melby (1986) found that males consistently rated females higher on sexual traits and concurred that "men tended to see more sexuality in females than women did,



and this occurred with a minimum of cues" (p. 297). Examination of flirting from the target's perspective may yield similar results.

Contributing to the ambiguity of flirting behaviors and their interpretation is participants' reported willingness to engage in flirting interaction regardless of their romantic interest in the target. A majority of participants (75.46%) reported on social flirting experiences in which they had a romantic interest in the target while only 36.81% of participants reported a romantic interest in their target in the work context. These data contradict Montgomery's (1989) earlier findings. In her study of students, sexual interest was reported by less than 20% of the participants as a motive for flirting. In this study, the individual interpretation item of sexual interest achieved a mean of 1.895 in the social context and a mean of 1.024 in the work context (response scale=0 to 5). The data is particularly conflicting for the social setting. A possible explanation is that participants may have a romantic or sexual interest in targets but avoid expressing that motive through flirting until they have a positive indication that the target is amenable to such interaction.

There may be greater interest in being romantically interested in the social target because successful flirting means the initiator will have the opportunity to follow through. Otherwise, social flirting with someone the target has no interest in would be wasted interaction. In the work context, flirting may be perceived to be appropriate because the formality of the context or the distance in the interaction relationship means the initiator does not have to follow througn. This confirms Simmel's (1950) notion of flirting as game playing. Rather than increasing emotional or relational intimacy, flirting as game playing may be a device for passing the time, being humorous, stroking one's own ego, or for developing a work relationship. Confounding the initiator's intent or motivation, participants overwhelmingly reported that targets in both settings flirted back (social=94.7%; work=77.3%).

These findings challenge the assumption that people who flirt have relational development as part of their behavioral motivation. We would assume that the target would have to be minimally attractive to the initiator for flirting to occur. Yet, these data do not suggest that relational development leading to an intimate relationship is the nature of all flirting. While participants reported that they knew the target, less than 40% reported romantic interest in their target in the work environment. The only



logical conclusion is that flirting is one method people use to develop relationships--including platonic or collegial work relationships. Because most participants reported that their targets returned their flirting behaviors, we may also assume that flirting is perceived a game to be played by both interactants.

Going back to Montgomery's (1989) underlying assumptions, this study confirms that flirting is behavioral and is a communicative process. While flirting was initiated to accomplish some goal, we cannot assume that the initiator's goal is one of romantic affiliation. Heterosexual flirting may fulfill a sexual affiliation need, but not necessarily a romantic one. Showing others than one has the power to flirt or can successfully flirt may be the goal of flirting experiences in the work context. These data do not suggest that flirting is always a precursor to sexual or romantic involvement. These data do underscore Montgomery's assumption that flirting is subtle and ambiguous. The contextual implication indicates that flirting may be motivated by game playing. The unfortunate consequence is that innocent game playing on the part of the flirter may be perceived negatively, or as harassment, by the target.

Conclusion

In responding to the research questions that guided this study, there appears to be little difference in how females and males identify and interpret flirting behavior. That flirting was not reserved for targets with whom the initiator had or wished a romantic involvement speaks to the ambiguous nature of the interaction, particularly since the friendliness motive received the highest mean of all interpretations (social=3.913; work=3.762). A friendliness dimension (showing attention, being polite) may to provide a baseline for a variety of heterosexual relationships whether relational intentions are platonic, romantic, or sexual. "The mesage-sender's intent may or may not be to harasses and/or dominate; but if the message-receiver assigns adverse meaning to the sender's behavior a sexual harassment charge may be made" (Gilsdorf, 1990, p. 71). In the work setting, the flirter uses friendliness as a motive for initiating interaction with a subordinate. The target does not flirt back but does not overly state his/her disinterst. Perceiving a lack of a negative response, the superior continues flirting using a wider spectrum of behavioral cues to deliver his/her flirtatious intent. At this point, the flirter believes he/she is doing nothing wrong, but the subordinate perceives the continued flirtatious behavior as violating the superior-subordinate relationship . . . after all, these same flirtatious attempts are the ones he/she is accustomed



to receiving in social settings where romantic or sexual interest is conveyed through flirting. Given this scenario, it is no wonder that there is little societal agreement about the point at which acceptable flirting becomes unwelcomed sexual harassment.



References

- Abbey, A. (1982). Sex differences in attributions for friendly behavior: Do males misperceive females' friendliness? Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 42(5), 830-838.
- Abbey, A., & Melby, C. (1986). The effects of nonverbal cues on gender differences in perceptions of sexual intent. Sex Roles, 5/6, 283-298.
- Bell, R. A., & Buerkel-Rothfuss. (1990). S(he) loves me, s(he) loves me not: Predictors of relational information-seeking in courtship and beyond. Communication Quarterly, 38, 64-82.
- Buunk, B., & Hupka, R. B. (1987). Cross-cultural differences in the elicitation of sexual jealousy. <u>The</u> Journal of Sex Research, 23, 12-22.
- Cohen, L. R. (1985). Nonverbal (mis)communication between managerial men and women. In B. A. Stead (Ed.), <u>Women in management</u> (2nd ed.), p. 177-184). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall
- Cozby, F. C., & Rosenblatt, P. C. (1972). Flirting. Sexual Behavior, 2(10), 10-16.
- Denfled, D. (1972). Different "languages" Sexual Behavior, 2(10), 15.
- Downey, J. L., & Vitulli, W. F. (1987). Self-report measures of behavioral attributions related to interpersonal flirtation situations. Psychological Reports, 61, 899-904.
- Flirting can send mixed messages. (1990, July). USA Today, p. 9.
- Gilsdorf, J. W. (1990). Sexual harassment as a liability issue in communication. <u>The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication</u>, <u>53</u>, 68-75.
- Gutek, B. A., Cohen, A. G., & Konrad, A. M. (1990). Predicting social-sexual behavior at work: A contact hypothesis. <u>Academy of Management Journal</u>, 33, 560-577.
- Gutek, B. A., Morasch, B., & Cohen, A. G. (1983). Interpreting social-sexual behavior in a work setting. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 22, 30-48.
- Is your office an erogenous zone? (1991, December/January). Savvy Woman, pp. 60-64.
- Lieberman, L. (1972). "I--it" rather than "I--thou" Sexual Behavior, 2(10), 10.
- Montgomery, B. M. (1989). <u>Understanding flirtatious communication from the participants' perspective</u>. Unpublished manuscript.
- Murstein, B. I. (1970). Stimulus-value-role: A theory of marital choice. <u>Journal of Marriage and the Family</u>, <u>32</u>, 465-481.
- "Our Stories": Communication Professionals' Narratives of Sexual Harassment. <u>Journal of Applied</u> <u>Communication Research</u>, 20, 363-390.
- Patzer, G. L. (1985). The physical attractiveness phenomena. New York: Plenum Press.
- Powell, G. N. (1983, July/August). Sexual harassment: Confronting the issue of definition. <u>Business Horizons</u>, <u>26</u>(4), pp. 24-28.



- Quinn, R. E. (1977). Coping with cupid: The formation, impact, and management of romantic relationships in organizations. <u>Administrative Science Quarterly</u>, <u>22</u>, 30-45.
- Rapp, E. (1992, February). Dangerous liaisons. Working Woman, pp. 56-61.
- Rowland, D. L., Crisler, L. J., & Cox, D. J. (1982). Flirting between college students and faculty. <u>The Journal of Sex Research</u>, <u>18</u>(4), 346-359.
- Saal, F. E., Johnson, C. B., & Weber, N. (1989). Friendly or sexy. It may depend on whom you ask. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 13, 263-276.
- Shotland, R. L., & Craig, J. M. (1988). Can men and women differentiate between friendly and sexually interested behavior? social Psychology Quarterly, 51, 66-73.
- Simmel, G. (1950). The sociology of Georg Simmel. (K. Wolff, trans). New York: The Free Press.
- Stead, B. A. (1985). Women in management (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Tannen, D. (1990). You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Taylor, B., & Conrad, C. (1992). Narratives of sexual harassment: Organizational dimension. <u>Journal of Applied Communication Research</u>, 20, 401-418.
- Uncertainty persisted on sexual harassment. (1992, July 29). The Wall Street Journal, p. B1.
- Walster, E., & Walster, G. W. (1976). Interpersonal attraction. In B. Seidenberg and A. Snadowsky (Eds.), <u>Social psychology: An introduction (pp. 279-308. New York: Press Press.</u>
- Wood, J. T. (1992). Telling our stories: Narratives as a basis for theorizing sexual harassment. <u>Journal of Applied Communication Research</u>, 20, 349-362.



Figure 1

Montgomery's Flirting Behaviors and Interpretations

Behaviors

Eye behavior (wink, stare)
Physical contact (touch, bump)
Conversational talk (small talk, compliment)
Facial expressions (smile, blush)
Proximity (move close, dance together)
Voice (laugh, whisper)
Body movement (posture, blow a kiss)
Appearance (wear attractive clothes, perfume/cologne)
Goods and services (buy drink, give card)

<u>Interpretations</u>

Playful (joke around, play fight)
Friendly (show attention, be polite)
Sexual (sexual innuendo, suggestive stance)
Submissive (act modest, act dumb)
Controlling (show off, act impressive)
Disinterested (be hard to get, put person down)



Table 1

<u>Item Means and Item-to-Total Correlations</u>

				ltem-
	to-Total	Mean	s.d.	
Item	Correlation	weam	5.u.	
Socia	al Behaviors	<u>-</u>		
1	Eye behavior (wink, stare)	3.240	1.201	.384
2	Physical contact (touch, bump)	2.419	1.563	.631
3	Conversational talk (small talk, compliment)	3.663	1.151	.587
4	Facial expressions (smile, blush)	3.854	1.104	.579
5	Proximity (move close, dance together)	2.959	1.492	.568
6	Voice (laugh, whisper)	3.215	1.381	.600
7	Body movement (posture, blow a kiss)	2.294	1.486	.563
8	Appearance (wear attractive clothes, perfume/cologne)	3.392	1.461	.401
9	Goods and _3rvices (buy drink, give card)	2.000	1.652	.307
	al Interpretations	0.044	4.460	.454
10	Playful (joke around, play fight)	3.244	1.462 1.154	.323
11	Friendly (show attention, be polite)	3.913	1.154	.334
12	Sexual (sexual innuendo, suggestive stance)	1.895	1.458	.385
13	Submissive (act modest, act dumb)	1.407	1.436	.450
14 15	Controlling (show off, act impressive) Disinterested (be hard to get, put person	1.889 1.410	1.607	.378
	•			
Wor	k Behaviors	0.000	4.505	E1.4
1	Eye behavior (wink, stare)	2.396	1.585	.514 .521
2	Physical contact (touch, bump)	1.691	1.587	.618
3	Conversational talk (small talk, compliment)	3.370	1.398	.583
4	Facial expressions (smile, blush)	3.218	1.482	.595
5	Proximity (move close, dance together)	1.570	1.523 1.576	.563
6	Voice (laugh, whisper)	2.770	1.576	.571
7	Body movement (posture, blow a kiss)	1.588	1.745	.376
8	Appearance (wear attractive clothes, perfume/cologne)	2.515 0.994	1.743	.344
9	Goods and services (buy drink, give card)	0.994	1.500	.044
	rk Interpretations Playful (joke around, play fight)	3.000	1.624	.433
10	Friendly (show attention, be polite)	3.762	1.338	.382
11	Sexual (sexual innuendo, suggestive stance)	1.025	1.379	.470
12	Sexual (sexual influence, suggestive stance) Submissive (act modest, act dumb)	1.305	1.412	.476
13	Controlling (show off, act impressive)	1.693	1.708	.549
14 15	Disinterested (be hard to get, put person	1.299	1.624	.286
13	Distillerested (see finite to got, put potosti			

