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AN EXAMINATION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS  
IN THE AIR FORCE FOR FY 1987

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine 163 filed complaints of sexual harassment in the Air Force for FY 1987. Variables investigated included characteristics of the complainant/victim, the alleged offender, and the complaint situations, as well as information about the confirmation process and the outcome of the complaint. Descriptive statistics showed that the characteristics of sexual harassment in this particular sample are rather similar to harassment in civilian organizations. It was also found that the 'hostile environment' type of sexual harassment was more prevalent than the 'economic injury' type. The implications of these results for sexual harassment training are discussed.

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AN EXAMINATION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS  
IN THE AIR FORCE FOR FY 1987

Sexual harassment is now recognized as a significant problem in both civilian and military organizations. Two major surveys of Federal workers (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1981, 1988) found that as many as 42% of the female workers felt that they had been sexually harassed in their jobs. These surveys also involved assessments of sexual harassment among civilian employees in the various branches of the military, including the Air Force, in which 45-46% (1988, 1981) of the female employees surveyed felt that they had experienced sexual harassment in their jobs over a 2-year period.

Sexual harassment can have consequences for both the individuals involved and other members of the organization. It can result in physical and psychological stress reactions (Crull, 1982), absenteeism, turnover, and decreased productivity (USMSPB, 1988). In military organizations, these problems may all affect mission accomplishment (Reilly, 1980).

At the urging of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS), the Department of Defense (DoD) appointed a task force to study the current status of women in the military. It was the finding of this task force that "sexual harassment remains a significant problem in all Services" (Department of Defense, 1988, p. 1). The members of the task force also pointed out that the extent of this problem is difficult to document because of "lack of a uniform DoD-wide definition of sexual harassment and uniform assessment procedures" (Department of Defense, 1988, p. 1).

The various branches of the military provide basic assessment data on the incidence of sexual harassment, and there have been attempts to determine the characteristics of sexual harassment from limited self-report sample surveys (e.g., Canny, 1986; Reilly, 1980). However, there have been no attempts to examine the details of actual filed sexual harassment complaints. Such investigations have been done with cases of civilian sexual harassment (e.g., Coles, 1986; Terpstra & Cook, 1985), and these results are useful in educating employers in the "social reality of sexual harassment" (Coles, 1986, p. 81). These results can provide the organization with information about the typical sexual harassment situation, as well as insight into the complaint process.

The purpose of this study was to examine 163 of the 235 filed complaints of sexual harassment in the Air Force for FY 1987. The Air Force was chosen for this study because it was the only Service that was able to provide case descriptions (in the form of Social Actions reports) that contained information on the variables of interest. These variables included

characteristics of the complainant/victim, the alleged offender, and the complaint situation, as well as information about the confirmation process and the actual outcome of these complaints.

Information about these variables should help in understanding the dynamics of sexual harassment in a military setting. It is also hoped that this information may be useful in determining training objectives that accurately reflect the characteristics of sexual harassment complaints.

### Defining Sexual Harassment

The DoD prohibits "discrimination based on sex that includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other objectionable verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" (cited in Adde, 1987). The various Services have their own definitions of sexual harassment. The Air Force (see AFR 30-2), like many civilian organizations, uses a definition that is based on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines. According to the EEOC, sexual harassment includes:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis of employment decisions affecting the individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. (EEOC, 1980, p. 74677).

The above guidelines provide information about the various behaviors that may be considered sexual harassment, as well as the conditions under which these behaviors are prohibited. The guidelines have been described as prohibiting these behaviors when they lead to "economic injury" for the victim (as in points 1 and 2 of the Guidelines) and/or when they create a "hostile environment" (point 3) (cf. Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, 106 S.Ct. 2399, 1986).

While it is generally accepted that requests for sexual favors with threats or promises of hiring/firing or promotion/demotion are clearly not acceptable, the concept of "hostile environment" is less clear. One recent case (Broderick v. Ruder, 56 U.S.L.W. 2667, 1988) has shown how this type of sexual harassment can be pervasive, yet difficult to deal with. The plaintiff in this case was the victim of unwanted physical contact, although she was never sexually propositioned. However, she was successful in showing the court that the environment in which she worked (which included at least one sexual affair between a supervisor and secretary, sexual advances made to women

other than the plaintiff, and wild parties) created an unacceptable "hostile environment." The plaintiff further alleged that when she objected to this situation, she was retaliated against by supervisors who gave her lower performance evaluations and even transferred her. This case is important because it sets a precedent for the courts to consider situations in which the complainant has not been the direct victim of a severe sexual harassment behavior and where she/he does not suffer direct economic injury as the result of any such action. This case also provides an example of how sexual harassment may have detrimental effects not only for the victim, but for others in the organization.

Even with the guidelines provided by the EEOC and within individual organizations (such as the Air Force), there is still considerable uncertainty as to what determines if an incident is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a perceptual phenomenon: It is initially the perception of the victim that determines if a particular behavior is considered sexual harassment. It is then the perception of a supervisor or official in a grievance procedure whether the charge is valid. Unfortunately, it has also been shown that perceptions about sexual harassment vary.

One of the more consistent perceptual differences has been between the sexes (e.g., Gutek, 1982; Popovich, Licata, Nokovich, Martelli, & Zoloty, 1985; Powell, 1983), where women perceive these behaviors as more sexual harassment than do men. It has also been shown that these perceptions about sexual harassment are still changing and that, over time, people have included more behaviors in their own definitions of sexual harassment (Gutek, 1982). Characteristics of the situation may also affect perceptions of what is considered to be sexual harassment. For example, behaviors exhibited by a supervisor may be considered to be more definitely sexual harassment than those same behaviors exhibited by a co-worker (e.g., Popovich, et al., 1986).

Adding to the uncertainty of defining sexual harassment is the confusion between this construct and mutual sexual attraction and the similar constructs of sexism and sex discrimination (Popovich & Licata, 1987). There are various types of relationships that can occur in an organizational setting, not all of which are sexual harassment. Sexual attraction often takes place between those who meet on the job, and this attraction results in relationships. When the attraction is mutual and there is no abuse of power, the relationship may not necessarily be a harassing one (Jamison, 1983).

Sexual harassment has also been confused with sexism and sex discrimination. Sexism refers to a situation in which there is differential treatment of the sexes, often resulting in social, political, or economic discrimination (usually of women by men). Sexual harassment is actually a subset of sex discrimination behaviors; it is a situation in which there is a set of sexual

requirements that is held for one sex, but not for the other (Faley, 1982). Investigations of the characteristics of sexual harassment have shown that these requirements are held more often for females than males.

### Characteristics of Sexual Harassment

The difficulties in defining sexual harassment have prompted researchers to learn more about the characteristics of sexual harassment situations. There are a number of theories as to why sexual harassment occurs (cf. Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982). One theory that has received some empirical support is that of "sex-role spill-over," proposed by Gutek and her colleagues. They have defined sex-role spillover as "the carryover into the workplace of gender-based expectations that are irrelevant or inappropriate to work" (Gutek & Morasch, 1982, p. 55). Gutek has hypothesized that sex-role spillover will occur more frequently in situations in which the sex ratio is "skewed," either toward male-dominated (nontraditional female) jobs, or toward female-dominated (traditional female) jobs. Those jobs that are not skewed are considered to be "integrated."

Although sexual harassment, as the result of sex-role spillover, may be more frequent in skewed situations, it occurs for different reasons. In a male-dominated job, men may not know how to respond to a woman in a nontraditional job, so they react to her in terms of her sex role as opposed to her work role. For example, male police officers may be more comfortable treating a female police officer as a woman than as a colleague. In a female-dominated area, however, the job may be so identified with the female gender that the characteristics of the particular employee's sex are seen as part of her job. For example, nursing, which is a predominantly female occupation, is characterized in terms of such feminine qualities as gentleness and nurturance. In either of these extreme situations, the spillover of a person's sex role into the work role can lead to sexual harassment.

The characteristics of sexual harassment situations have been difficult to confirm empirically because of the sensitive and controversial nature of this topic. Much of the empirical information on the characteristics of sexual harassment has come from two types of studies. The major source of information has been self-report sample surveys, such as the USMSPB surveys of Federal workers (1981, 1988). Another technique has been to examine the characteristics of filed harassment complaints, as has been done by Coles (1986) and Terpstra and Cook (1985). These studies are particularly relevant here. The USMSPB surveys assessed Federal workers, including civilian employees of the Services. The Coles and Terpstra and the Cook studies used archival data, such as those available for the present study. All three studies also provide information about the characteristics of the victim, the alleged offender, the complaint situation, and the outcome of sexual harassment complaints.

Both self-report surveys and the use of archival data have their advantages and disadvantages. Each technique may also provide different, yet complementary results. Self-report surveys provide the researcher with a broad perspective of the scope of sexual harassment in an organization, including information about situations that have never been reported through official channels. However, these anonymous surveys tend to provide rather subjective information. They may also include reports of incidents that may not actually be sexual harassment according to the organization's definition. There is an additional problem with multiple individual reports of the same organizational incident, thereby inflating the incidence rate (this is particularly a problem when the respondents are asked to describe any incident they are familiar with, as opposed to only those incidents they have experienced personally).

Examination of archives, such as filed complaints, can provide detailed information about cases that were considered serious enough to report through official channels. This provides a degree of "objectivity" that is not always true of self-report surveys. These examinations can also provide insight into the complaint process. However, since it is estimated that only a fraction of sexual harassment incidents are actually reported (e.g., USMSPB, 1981), this type of analysis is limited in providing information about the scope of the problem.

The information provided by examinations of complaints can be used to confirm and supplement (particularly in terms of details) the information provided by self-report surveys. Examinations of complaints may also be used as a basis for developing such a survey for an organization.

One of the major variables of interest in both self-report surveys and examinations of sexual harassment complaints has been the characteristics of the victim or complainant. The typical victim of sexual harassment has been found to be female (Coles, 1986; Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1988) and fairly young (between the ages of 20-44) (Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1988), although Coles (1986) has pointed out that women of all ages in her sample of filed cases had been victims of harassment.

These studies have also shown that there is a tendency for the female victims of sexual harassment to be single (Terpstra & Cook, 1985) and/or divorced (USMSPB, 1981, 1988). Coles (1986) has reported that most of the victims in her sample were White, while the 1981 USMSPB survey found that male (but not female) victims of sexual harassment tended to be members of a racial or ethnic minority.

In terms of education, those women who tend to report higher rates of sexual harassment also seem to have higher levels of

education (Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1988). The USMSPB surveys (1981, 1988) have also shown that the female victims of sexual harassment in their samples have tended to work in positions that are nontraditional for their sex: an environment that is predominantly male, with a male supervisor. The 1981 survey results reported that these women often had jobs that could be categorized as trainee or professional/technical positions.

At odds with the USMSPB findings, Terpstra and Cook (1985) found paraprofessional/technical occupations to be over-represented in their sample (when compared to labor force statistics). However, the authors of this latter study indicate that this discrepancy may be due to the different classification categories used in the studies, and not necessarily indicative of conflicting results (Terpstra & Cook, 1985).

The characteristics of the victims of sexual harassment that have been culled from these studies provide some support for the sex-role spillover hypothesis of sexual harassment. It appears that those women who work in nontraditional areas may become victims of sexual harassment as their sex roles are substituted for their work roles by those who are unable or unwilling to see these women as subordinates or colleagues in the work force.

Although the characteristics of sexual harassers can be inferred from the situations of the victims, there has been less interest and information available concerning the characteristics of the perpetrator of sexual harassment. The typical harasser is most often male (Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1988) and, when reported in sample surveys, is more often a co-worker than a supervisor (USMSPB, 1981, 1988). However, Coles' (1986) examination of complaints revealed more complaints about owners/supervisors. This discrepancy between the survey and archival results may reflect the perceptual bias mentioned earlier: that supervisor harassment is considered to be more serious than co-worker harassment, and therefore more likely to result in a filed formal complaint.

Other information from the victim about the offender indicates that harassers tend to be married, the same race/ethnic background as their victim, and acting alone (USMSPB, 1981). There is also some evidence that the offenders may have harassed more than one victim (USMSPB, 1981).

Both self-report surveys and filed complaints have shown that the most frequently reported sexual harassment behaviors tend to be the less severe behaviors. Behaviors such as offensive language (unwanted sexual remarks, teasing, jokes, questions) and unwanted physical contact tended to be reported more than severe acts such as actual or attempted rape/assault (Coles, 1986; Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1988).

Victims of sexual harassment also reported repeated acts (USMSPB, 1981, 1988). These studies have further shown that more than one type of behavior is often reported by victims (Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981, 1988). Such findings indicate that sexual harassment is not usually an isolated incident.

The characteristics of these situations appear to fit the "hostile environment" profile of sexual harassment more than an "economic injury" definition. The "typical" sexual harassment situation seems to be characterized by repeated acts of less severe behaviors, which may contribute to the creation of an "intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment" (EEOC, 1980, p. 74677).

Despite the negative climate that can result from sexual harassment, most victims do not file formal charges. The 1988 USMSPB survey found that only 5% of victims of sexual harassment actually took "formal action," and even then, many of these respondents felt that their actions were not productive. Other options reported in this (and the 1981) survey included: ignoring the behavior, avoiding the offender, asking the offender to stop making a joke of the behavior, and threatening to tell or telling others.

In their examinations of complaints, Terpstra and Cook (1985) and Coles (1986) found that many of those who had filed sexual harassment complaints had been fired either as a direct result of refusing sexual advances or possibly indirectly as their job performance deteriorated as a result of the stress of the harassment. A lesser, but also sizable, number of complainants reported quitting their jobs as a response to the harassment.

Little information has been provided about the characteristics of a formal grievance procedure. Although many organizations have a policy of handling such complaints as quickly as possible, they can take time to process. Coles (1986) found that most complaints in her sample were resolved within 3 months, but that some cases took a year or more before resolution was reached.

The outcomes of these complaints are not always favorable for the complainant. Coles (1986) reported negotiated settlements for 47 of the 88 cases that she examined. Terpstra and Baker (1988), in a further analysis of the Terpstra and Cook (1985) data, found that 20 of the 65 cases they reviewed resulted in judgments favorable for the complainant. Terpstra and Baker (1988) also found that the more variables that were present in the case (e.g., type of behavior, witnesses, and whether notice was given), the more likely the outcome would be favorable for the complainant.

To summarize, both self-report surveys and examinations of complaints have revealed some fairly consistent characteristics of sexual harassment situations in civilian organizations. This information has helped to clarify the construct of sexual harassment, which has been very difficult to define. While the information provided by investigations of civilian organizations may be somewhat useful to the Services, it is not known how closely the characteristics of sexual harassment in military settings resemble those in nonmilitary organizations.

### Sexual Harassment in the Services

As mentioned earlier, the various Services do provide some assessment data on the incidence of sexual harassment complaints. There have also been at least two limited self-report sample surveys of sexual harassment: of the Navy (Reily, 1980) and of the Air Force (Canny, 1986). The information from these sources, combined with well-publicized anecdotal reports of specific cases, have provided evidence of the existence of sexual harassment as a problem in the Services, but little information as to its characteristics or scope. The DoD, at the recommendation of the Task Force on Women in the Military, is administering a survey to all of the Services, but this is first time that such broad information has been collected.

The existence of sexual harassment in the Services may be in part due to the particular characteristics of the situation. The integration of women into the male-dominated Services provides an example of the skewed sex ratios (Devilbliss, 1985) that have been hypothesized by Gutek to lead to sex-role spillover and possibly to sexual harassment. Evidence of the confusion between sex and work roles is provided by a comment cited by Tetrault (1988), who has found that "women interested in military careers are frequently accused of being either whores or lesbians" (p. 49). Reacting to women in terms of their sex roles as opposed to their work roles results in a climate that is conducive to sexual harassment.

Information about the specific characteristics of sexual harassment in the Services has been limited. Reily (1980) surveyed 90 enlisted women and interviewed 14 women officers in the Navy about their experiences of sexual harassment during their Navy careers. Like the civilian studies described earlier, she found that victims of sexual harassment tended to be divorced or single, lower grade enlisted personnel. The respondents in her sample also reported higher frequencies of less severe behaviors (e.g., verbal harassment) than of more severe behaviors (e.g., rape) and that peers were more likely to be the offenders than were supervisors. Many of the Navy women surveyed did not report the incidents, but preferred to handle the situation themselves. Reily also reported that these women felt that their experiences of sexual harassment negatively affected their attitudes in general and also their desire (and intention) to reenlist.

Another limited sample survey was reported by Canny (1986), who interpreted the results of a sexual harassment section from an Organizational Assessment Study of over 14,000 enlisted Air Force personnel. The survey included four questions about the sexual harassment experiences of respondents over the previous 4 weeks of work. The results of these questions in many ways are also similar to those results from civilian studies. Canny reported women were more likely than men to be the victims of sexual harassment and that verbal harassment was more frequent than physical harassment. He also reported that those women who claimed to be victims of verbal sexual harassment tended to have some college education (and beyond) and had been on active duty for less than 4 years. These women worked in larger groups, rated their supervisors lower (than those who did not report harassment), and also reported experiencing other negative job characteristics, such as equipment shortages and lengthy work hours. Most victims felt that the incident had been resolved.

While the information provided in these surveys is useful in determining the characteristics of sexual harassment in a military setting, these results are very general. Canny has pointed out some of these limits:

...simple accounts of sexual harassment do not shed light on whether one person harasses one, or more than one victim, and whether an harasser harasses only his/her own gender. Also "harasser-harassée ratios" (e.g., how numerically more men than women may be harassed, while proportionately more women are victims), and the impact of "perceived harassed" (i.e., harassment without a perpetrator) deserves further research and analysis. While there is little doubt that physical and verbal harassment do occur in the Air Force, judging the severity of self-reported harassment is difficult at best. (1986, p. ix)

The present study addresses some of these limitations through an examination of filed sexual harassment complaints in the Air Force for FY 1987. The pattern of these results is compared to the characteristics of sexual harassment in civilian organizations. Implications for training are also discussed.

## Method

### Subjects

Subjects in this study were members of the Air Force who had filed sexual harassment complaints through Social Actions during FY 1987. Information about these complainants was collected from sanitized copies of Social Actions Complaint forms (AF Form 1587). A request was made of all commands to send sanitized copies of the relevant complaints to the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI).

Sanitization usually involved blacking out the names of all persons involved, as well as telephone numbers and Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) duty codes. In some cases, sanitization also involved removal of other characteristics of the complainant and the alleged offender including rank, sex, and race/ethnic group. A number of the cases were also missing narrative descriptions of the complaint incident. Such cases were retained for analyses if enough information remained to merit their inclusion.

There were 235 sexual harassment complaints filed during FY 1987. One hundred sixty-eight of these cases were received at DEOMI from over 30 commands (both APO and CONUS). The cases involved processing from 1986 through 1988. Five of the received cases were found to be sex discrimination and not sexual harassment complaints, and these cases were removed from the analyses. Two cases were listed as "sex discrimination" only, but contained examples of sexual harassment, so were retained in the analyses. All analyses were conducted using the remaining 163 cases, which represented 69% of the complaints filed during FY 1987.

For the purposes of this study, all cases were coded for the victim of the sexual harassment, whether or not the victim was the actual complainant. Some cases were referrals and listed the referring supervisor as the complainant. In these cases, information about the actual victim was culled from the narrative.

Seventy-two percent (118) of the 163 cases in this sample were confirmed sexual harassment. This is greater than the 58% confirmation rate for the entire population of 235 sexual harassment complaints for FY 1987, from which this sample was taken.

All cases involved Air Force personnel, with the following exceptions: (a) one case of an Air Force member harassing an Army member, and (b) two cases of a civilian harassing a civilian in a military setting (neither of which was confirmed).

## Materials

A coding frame was developed to guide what variables were to be considered and how they were to be coded. The coding frame provided for 92 variables or items. The items in the coding frame (see Appendix A) were, in a large part, based upon the categories provided in the AF Social Actions Form 1587. Additional variables were added based upon the literature, an interview with a member of the Social Actions staff, and a reading of approximately 80 of the 163 cases.

These additional variables included items M through U and items LL and MM in the coding frame. Most of these items involved the characteristics of the incident and could be determined from the information provided in sections 15 and 19 of Form 1587.

Item M allowed for the coding of the types of behaviors described in the complaint. This list of behaviors was derived from other sexual harassment surveys (Benson & Thompson, 1982; Coles, 1986; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Padgitt & Padgitt, 1986; Terpstra & Cook, 1985; USMSPB, 1981). Only those behaviors experienced by the victim were coded in this category. Descriptions by the victim of actions against others were included in item R, which is discussed below.

Items N through S have been assessed in surveys of sexual harassment (e.g., USMSPB, 1981). These items allowed for the coding of whether the victim felt or feared retaliation for refusing or reporting the action (N), the number of (O) and duration (P) of these behaviors, whether the alleged offender acted alone (Q), if she/he harassed others (R), and if the victim objected to or refused the alleged offender's actions (S). These items are sometimes asked of the complainant during an interview with Social Actions. However, because there is usually little structure or consistency in these interviews, these items were not expected to be present in all cases.

Item T listed a number of channels other than Social Actions to which the victim may have complained. Most of these categories were derived from the "Report: Task Force on Women in the Military" (DoD, 1988). These categories were coded for only if the victim noted contact with these other agencies before coming to Social Actions.

Item LL was added after the coding had begun, when it was noticed that a number of the cases involved alcohol. Likewise, item MM was added after noting that some of the cases involved sexual harassment complaints by a pregnant victim.

After the initial development of the coding frame, 10 cases were coded by the experimenter and 3 of these cases were re-coded by another psychologist with a background in sexual harassment

research. Based upon the results of this pilot coding, the coding frame was adjusted and coding proceeded. All coding was done by the researcher.

### Procedure

Responses to each of the items were recorded on a form designed for the coding frame (see Appendix B). Coding took place over a 3-week period. The responses were checked and edited continuously by the researcher throughout the coding process to ensure that the coding was consistent.

After approximately 80% of the cases were coded, reliability estimates were assessed. Two raters (a research psychologist and a DEOMI staff member with Social Actions experience) participated in a single training session in which the coding frame was explained and one sample case was coded with the researcher. Each rater then coded 5 different cases which had been selected (using a table of random numbers) from the first 130 cases coded by the researcher. Because the data were nominal in nature, percentage agreement was used to calculate the reliability estimate. The average agreement between each rater and the experimenter across the 10 cases was 90%.

After the coding was completed, the "other" categories for items M and HH were re-coded to include new options based upon the reading of the cases. Item M, which allowed for the coding of types of sexual harassment behaviors, was expanded to include an option for indirect sexual harassment behaviors, such as the spreading of sexual rumors about the victim. Item HH was expanded to include all options for action taken when discrimination was confirmed.

The coded responses were then input to a data file. To ensure consistency of input, occasional lines were double-checked during data entry, and several variables were checked against the original data across all 163 cases.

### Results

The results of this examination of sexual harassment complaints are reported by the following categories of characteristics: the victim, the offender, the relationship between the victim and offender, the incident, the process, and the outcome. Results are provided for both the full sample of 163 usable cases and the subsample of 118 confirmed cases.

Because of the nominal nature of much of the data, the majority of the results are frequencies which are reported as percentages (rounded to whole numbers) with actual frequency values following in parentheses. Please note that the percentages may not sum to exactly 100% because of rounding and also because, in some cases, more than one option was able to be coded

for within a category (e.g., multiple types of behaviors per case).

### Characteristics of the Victim/Complainant

In the 163 cases, there were 176 victims/complainants (with a maximum of 3 per case) and 131 victims/complainants in the subsample of 118 confirmed cases. As was pointed out earlier, the complainant in these cases was not necessarily the victim, but for the purposes of this research, the characteristics of the actual victim were determined from the narrative. For this reason, the label "victim" will be used here to refer to the actual victim of the sexual harassment, while the use of the term "complainant" is reserved for instances in which it was not clear if the complainant was the actual victim.

In the full sample of 163 cases, the complainant was the actual victim in 87% (141) of the cases. In the remaining cases, the complainant was the victim's supervisor, co-worker, base commander, or an anonymous referral to Social Actions (SL).

Sex of the victims. The overwhelming majority of the victims in this sample were females. In the full sample, 95% (167) of the victims were females, 3% (6) were males, and the sex of 2% (3) of the victims was not known. The proportions in the subsample of the confirmed cases were very similar to the full sample, with 95% (125) of the substantiated cases involving females, and 2% (3) involving males. The sex of 2% (3) of the victims was unknown.

Race/ethnic backgrounds of the victims. The race/ethnic background of most of the victims was White. In the full sample, 60% (105) of the victims were Whites, 19% (34) were Blacks, 3% (6) were Hispanics, and the race/ethnic backgrounds of 18% (31) were unknown. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 56% (74) of the victims were Whites, 20% (26) were Blacks, 3% (4) were Hispanics, and the backgrounds of the remaining 21% (27) were not known.

In order to determine if any particular race/ethnic groups were over- (or under-) represented in this sample of victims, a chi-square analysis was performed to compare the differences between the observed and expected frequencies for female victims. The expected frequencies were based on proportions taken from the distribution of Air Force active duty personnel for 1987 compiled from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC, 1987). These values can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Observed and Expected Frequencies of Female Victims as a Function  
of Race/Ethnic Background

<u>Race</u>	<u>Observed Freq.</u>	<u>Expected Freq.</u>	<u>Expected Perc.*/**</u>
<u>Full Sample</u>			
Whites	101	104	74.93%
Blacks	32	31	21.94%
Hispanics	6	4	3.12%
Total	139	139	99.99%
<u>Confirmed Cases Only</u>			
Whites	72	76	74.93%
Blacks	25	22	21.94%
Hispanics	4	3	3.12%
Total	101	101	99.99%

\* Expected percentages based on September, 1987, Distribution of Active Duty Forces by Service, Rank, Sex, and Ethnic Group for the Air Force (DMDC, 1987).

\*\* Percentages total to slightly less than 100% due to rounding.

Neither the chi square for the full sample ( $\chi^2 = 1.42$ ,  $p > .05$ ), nor for the subsample of confirmed cases ( $\chi^2 = .95$ ,  $p > .05$ ) was significant. This indicates that no particular race/ethnic group was over- or underrepresented in this sample of female victims.

Grades of the victims. The majority of the victims were enlisted personnel, with the modal (or most frequent) grade being an E-3, in both the full sample and the subsample of confirmed cases. Two percent (3) of the victims were officers of the O-1 level, although only 1% (1) of these cases was confirmed. Ten percent (18) of the victims in the full sample were civilians, but only 7% (9) of the subsample of confirmed cases listed the victims as being civilians. A frequency distribution of the grades represented in this sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Victim Grades for Full and Confirmed Samples

Victim Grade	Full Sample		Confirmed Sample	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage*	Frequency
O-1	2%	3	1%	1
E-1	3%	6	5%	6
E-2	14%	25	15%	20
E-3	27%	47	26%	34
E-4	17%	30	17%	22
E-5	11%	20	14%	18
E-6	3%	5	3%	4
E-7	1%	1	1%	1
Civilian	10%	18	7%	9
Unknown	12%	21	12%	16
Total	100%	176	101%	131

\* Percentage totals to greater than 100% due to rounding.

Other characteristics of the victims. Five percent (8) of the cases involved pregnant victims. Although it is not possible at this time to determine how representative this number is of pregnancy in the entire Air Force population, it appears that pregnancy may be associated with problems in the workplace. These cases (six of which were confirmed) involved behaviors both related and unrelated to the victim's pregnancy. Pregnancy-related sexual harassment behaviors included spreading sexual rumors about the victim and sexual propositions. These cases also included examples of sexist comments, unwanted attempts to touch the victim's stomach, and comments made to others about how the victim was going to be useless as a worker because of her pregnancy.

Summary. The characteristics of the victim in this sample are similar to those seen in civilian samples. The "typical" victim in both the civilian and military research is female and White. While research using civilian samples has also found the victim often to be young, this could not be determined directly from the information provided in this sample. However, the relatively low grade level indicates that the "typical" victim in this sample may also be fairly young (and younger than her harasser).

## Characteristics of the Alleged/Confirmed Offender

In the full sample of 163 cases, there were 185 offenders (with a maximum of 4 per case) and 134 offenders in the subsample of confirmed cases.

Sex of the offenders. Virtually all of the offenders in this sample were males. In the full sample, 94% (173) of the alleged offenders were males, 3% (5) were females, and the sex of 4% (7) of the offenders was not known. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 96% (128) of the confirmed offenders were male, 2% (3) were female and the sex of 2% (3) was unknown.

Race/ethnic backgrounds of the offenders. The race/ethnic background of most of the offenders was White. In the full sample, 55% (101) of the alleged offenders were Whites, 30% (55) were Blacks, 5% (9) were Hispanics, and the race/ethnic backgrounds of 10% (9) were not known. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 56% (75) of the confirmed offenders were Whites, 32% (43) were Blacks, 3% (4) were Hispanics, 1% (1) was an American Indian, and the backgrounds of 8% (11) of the offenders were not known.

In order to determine if any particular race/ethnic group was over- (or under-) represented in this group of offenders, a chi-square analysis was performed. This analysis compared the actual frequency of male offenders of White, Black, and Hispanic backgrounds with the expected frequencies (Table 3) based on the Air Force, 1987 active duty grade distributions (DMDC, 1987).

The chi-square values were significant for both the full sample ( $\chi^2 = 48.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the subsample of confirmed cases ( $\chi^2 = 34.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The greatest difference was between the observed and expected frequencies for Black male offenders. In both the full sample and the subsample of confirmed cases, Black males were overrepresented, while White males were underrepresented. The difference between the observed and expected frequencies for Hispanic males was very small in the full sample and nonexistent in the subsample of confirmed cases.

Grades of the offenders. As was true of the victims in this sample, most of the alleged and confirmed offenders were enlisted personnel (although there were more officers represented among the offenders than among the victims). In this sample of offenders, the modal grade for the full sample was E-6 and in the subsample of confirmed cases, it was E-5. (Note that both of these grades are higher than the modal grade for victims, E-3.) Eight percent (11) of the alleged offenders were civilians, while 4% (5) of the confirmed offenders were civilians. A frequency distribution of the grades represented in this sample is presented in Table 4.

Table 3

Observed and Expected Frequencies of Male Offenders as a  
Function of Race/Ethnic Background

Race	Observed Freq.	Expected Freq.	Expected Perc.*/**
<u>Full Sample</u>			
Whites	98	131	81.71%
Blacks	53	23	14.68%
Hispanics	9	6	3.60%
Total	160	160	99.99%
<u>Confirmed Cases Only</u>			
Whites	74	97	81.71%
Blacks	41	18	14.68%
Hispanics	4	4	3.60%
Total	119	119	99.99%

\* Expected percentages based on September, 1987, Distribution of Active Duty Forces by Service, Rank, Sex, and Ethnic Group for the Air Force (DMDC, 1987).

\*\* Percentages total to slightly less than 100% due to rounding.

Summary. As was true of the victims in this sample, the "typical" offender is rather similar in characteristics to those found in research on civilian sexual harassment. In both the civilian and military samples, the offender is usually male, and is often the same race as the victim. As will be seen in the next section, the characteristics of the relationships between the offender and the victim in this military sample are also similar to those found in civilian samples.

The Relationships Between Victims and Offenders

Although there were 163 cases coded in this study, the fact that some cases contained multiple victims and multiple offenders yielded 199 possible combinations across the full sample of cases and 148 combinations in the subsample of confirmed cases.

In the full sample, 38% (76) of the situations involved a supervisor harassing a subordinate, while 28% (55) of the situations involved co-worker harassment, and 34% (68), harassment by an individual. This pattern was similar in the subsample of confirmed cases, in which 38% (56) of these situations involved supervisor harassment, 30% (45) involved co-worker harassment, and 32% (47) involved harassment by an individual. Please note that the "co-worker" category also included classmates, and the "individual" category also included "other/unknown relationship."

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of Offender Grades for Full and Confirmed Samples

Offender Grade	Full Sample		Confirmed Cases	
	Percentage*	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency*
O-2	1%	1	1%	1
O-3	4%	7	4%	5
O-4	4%	7	4%	5
O-5	4%	7	3%	4
O-6	1%	1	1%	1
E-1	1%	1	1%	1
E-2	4%	8	4%	5
E-3	5%	10	5%	7
E-4	12%	22	13%	17
E-5	17%	31	19%	26
E-6	17%	32	19%	25
E-7	10%	18	9%	12
E-8	4%	8	4%	6
E-9	3%	6	3%	4
Civilian	6%	11	4%	5
Unknown	8%	15	7%	10
Total	101%	185	101%	134

\* Percentages total to greater than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5 provides further information about the relationships between victims and offenders in this sample.

The information presented in this table is similar to the findings about the individual characteristics of the victims and offenders presented in the previous sections. This table however, provides more detailed information about the possible combinations of victim and offender.

Most of the sexual harassment incidents in both the full sample and the subsample of confirmed cases involved a male harassing a female, a nonminority (i.e., White) harassing another nonminority, and a person of higher rank harassing one of lower rank.

The information provided in the table also shows that other combinations do occur. For example, the section on "Race/ethnic background" shows evidence of inter- as well as intraracial sexual harassment.

Table 5

Percentages and Frequencies of the Relationships Between  
Victims and Offenders for Full and Confirmed Samples

Relationship	Full Sample		Confirmed Cases	
	Percentage*	Frequency	Percentage*	Frequency
<u>Sex**</u>				
Male H. Female	91%	181	92%	136
Female H. Male	2%	4	1%	2
Female H. Female	1%	1	1%	1
Male H. Male	1%	2	1%	2
Unknown	6%	11	5%	7
Total	101%	199	100%	148
<u>Race/Ethnic Background***</u>				
Non-min. H. Min.	9%	18	8%	12
Min. H. Non-min.	19%	38	18%	26
Non-min. H. Non-min.	35%	69	34%	51
Min. H. Min.	12%	23	12%	18
Unknown	26%	51	27%	41
Total	101%	199	99%	148
<u>Grade****</u>				
Higher H. Lower	55%	109	58%	86
Lower H. Higher	5%	10	5%	7
Same Grade	8%	15	9%	13
Civ. H. Mil.	4%	8	3%	5
Mil. H. Civ.	10%	19	7%	10
Civ. H. Civ.	1%	2	0%	0
Unknown	18%	36	18%	27
Total	101%	199	100%	148

\* Percentages total to slightly greater or less than 100% due to rounding.

\*\* H. = Harassing

\*\*\* Non-min. = Nonminority (includes whites)

Min. = Minority (includes Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indian)

\*\*\*\* Civ. = Civilian (can include dependents)

Mil. = Military

Summary. The relationships between the victims and offenders in this military sample also seem to be similar to those found in civilian research, particularly the research dealing with examination of complaints (as opposed to survey results). The "typical" complaint situation in both the civilian and military samples involves a male harassing a female, superior harassment of a subordinate, and a higher proportion of harassment within race (with the military sample showing the highest proportion of cases involving a White harassing another White).

### The Characteristics of the Incidents

The information in this section has been taken from the narrative reports of sexual harassment that are provided in many Social Actions reports. Caution must be made in interpreting this information for several reasons. First, there are no standard interview questions used to guide this narrative, and the detail of the information provided is not consistent across reports. Second, a number of cases were missing all or part of the narrative reports, or were heavily sanitized. Finally, as is true of any attempt at content analysis, inferences are made by a coder which may or may not accurately reflect the intent of the author of the narrative.

Type of discrimination. In addition to sexual harassment, some of the cases also involved other types of discrimination. In the full sample, 12% (20) of the cases also involved sex discrimination and 4% (7) had elements of race discrimination. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 14% (16) of the cases included sex discrimination and 5% (6) involved race discrimination.

Type of behavior. Table 6 provides a frequency distribution of the types of behaviors involved in these incidents.

The most frequent behavior occurring in this sample was "Offensive language." One reason for the high frequency of this behavior may be the scope of this category, which included sexual comments about the victim or offender's dating or sex life and specific (graphic) comments about the victim's body. The category did not include sexual propositions, and, for this reason, is considered to be a "less severe" type of sexual harassment. The second most frequent category was "Unwanted physical contact (of a sexual nature)." This category included deliberate touching, pinching or grabbing of areas not including the breasts or genitals, and (because of this exclusion) was considered to be a "less severe" behavior.

Physical contact that involved touching breasts and/or genitals was considered to be a physical "pass" and was coded as a sexual proposition. "Sexual propositions" included physical and/or verbal sexual advances and was divided into three categories. "Sexual propositions unlinked to job outcomes" referred to

Table 6

Percentages and Frequencies of the Type of Behaviors Reported  
in the Complaints for Full and Confirmed Samples

Behavior	Full Sample		Confirmed Sample	
	Percentage*	Frequency	Percentage*	Frequency
Offensive Language	58%	94	59%	70
Unwanted Physical Contact	31%	50	31%	37
Sexual Proposition: Unlinked to Job	27%	44	29%	34
Socialization or Date Request	22%	35	22%	26
Unwanted Non-Verbal Attention	14%	23	13%	15
Complimentary Comments	14%	23	13%	14
Unwanted Letters, Calls, and Gifts	12%	20	10%	12
Sexual Climate	9%	15	10%	12
Sexual Rumors	8%	13	7%	8
Sexual Proposition: Tied to a Negative Job Outcome	6%	10	5%	6
Sexual Assault/ Rape: Attempted	5%	8	4%	5
Sexual Proposition: Tied to a Positive Job Outcome	3%	5	3%	4
Sexual Assault/ Rape: Actual	0%	0	0%	0
Other**	15%	24	14%	17
Sexism	14%	23	15%	18

\* Percentages total to greater than 100% due to multiple behaviors per case.

\*\* "Other" includes unidentified behaviors in sexual harassment cases.

physical or verbal sexual advances in which no mention was made about any threats or promises if the victim rejected or acquiesced to the request/behavior. It appeared much more frequently in this sample than the more severe behaviors of "Sexual propositions tied to negative job consequences" (i.e., threats) and propositions tied to "positive job consequences" (i.e., promises).

The lower end of the frequency distribution also contained several other of the "more severe" behaviors, including "Sexual assault or rape: Attempted" and actual rape (of which there were no instances).

In the middle of the frequency distribution were those behaviors that are often difficult to label as sexual harassment. These behaviors included "Socialization or date requests" (including unwanted visits to home/dormitory room), "Unwanted nonverbal attention" (such as suggestive looks, stares, or obscene gestures), and "Unwanted calls, letters, and gifts." Another category, "Complimentary comments," is a good example of the type of ambiguous behavior that may or may not be perceived as sexual harassment. This category includes general comments about the physical appearance and/or attractiveness of the victim (e.g., "You're pretty"), or statements of affection (e.g., "I like you"). This category was coded for when the victim mentioned that such comments were made in a way that made her/him feel uncomfortable.

While the behaviors mentioned above were directed toward the victim, the coding frame also allowed for the coding of indirect sexual harassment behaviors. These more indirect behaviors included "Sexual climate" and "Spreading sexual rumors." These behaviors were not part of any of the other scales used to develop this list, but were added to reflect the behaviors reported in this sample.

The category of "Sexual climate" refers to sexual pictures, magazines, gestures, or comments that were not directed toward the victim, but that the victim found offensive. The other category was labeled "Sexual rumors," and included reports by others to the victim about what the offender had been saying about the victim (e.g., "She has AIDS").

Finally, the coding frame also included "Sexism" as a category. As was mentioned in the beginning of this report, sexism and sexual harassment are not the same construct, but they are often linked. Sexist (but nonsexual) behaviors were present in some of the cases in this sample, along with the specifically sexual behaviors. This result was in line with the previously cited finding that these sexual harassment cases sometimes included elements of sexism as well as racism.

Frequency and duration of behaviors. Most of the cases in the full sample involved multiple incidents (not necessarily separated by time), such as multiple comments or even different behaviors. In the full sample, 87% (141) of the cases involved multiple incidents, 8% (13) were single incidents, and 6% (9) of these cases did not include enough information to make this determination. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 86% (101) of the cases involved multiple incidents, 9% (10) were single incidents, and 6% (7) of the confirmed cases did not contain enough information about this variable.

Information about the duration of these behaviors was difficult to infer from the narrative descriptions of the incidents. However, in those cases for which this variable could be coded, most of the complaints were filed about behaviors that had lasted 1 week or less. In the full sample, 31% (50) of the cases involved behaviors that occurred for less than 1 week, 3% (5) from 1 to 3 weeks, 13% (21) from 1 to 6 months, and 6% (10) of the complaints were about behaviors that had occurred for more than 6 months. Forty-seven percent (77) of the cases did not contain enough information to code for this variable. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 86% (101) of the cases involved multiple incidents, 9% (10) were single incidents, and 6% (7) of the confirmed cases did not contain enough information about this variable.

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Due to the large amount of missing information, these results must be interpreted with caution. However, there appears to be a pattern in which there is a tendency for victims to either file complaints when the sexual harassment first begins (less than 1 week) or wait until the behavior has gone on for 1 to 6 months.

Behaviors of offenders. Most alleged and confirmed offenders acted alone in their sexual harassment of the victims. In the full sample, 81% (132) of the cases listed only one offender, while there were multiple offenders (both charged and not

charged) in 15% (24) of the cases. There was insufficient information to make this determination in 4% (7) of the cases. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 81% (95) of the cases involved only one offender, while 14% (17) listed multiple offenders, and 5% (6) of the cases did not provide enough information about this variable.

There was limited information about whether the offender had harassed others. In the full sample, 34% (55) of the cases included information about the offender's harassing others, although this information was not included in 66% (108) of these cases. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 34% (40) of the cases included information about the offender's harassing others, although this information was also missing from 66% (78) of these cases.

Alcohol use. Alcohol use was mentioned in a number of the cases. In the full sample, alcohol use on the part of the offender was definitely present in 15% (24) of the cases and possibly present (e.g., the incident took place in a bar but no specific mention was made of offender alcohol use) in 5% (8) of the cases. There was no mention of alcohol use in 80% (131) of the cases. In the subsample of confirmed cases, alcohol use was definitely present in 16% (19) of the cases, possibly present in six percent (7) of the cases and not mentioned in 78% (92) of the cases.

Reactions of victims. Victims in many of the cases reported that they had objected to (including refused or rebuffed) the offender's behaviors. In the full sample, 40% (66) of the cases included reports of the victim objecting to the offender, while in 2% (4) of the cases, it was specifically mentioned that the victim did not complain. Other reactions (including someone other than the victim objecting to the offender for the victim) were listed in 4% (6) of the cases. No information about whether the victim objected was found in 53% (87) of the cases in the full sample. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 40% (47) of the cases reported the victim objected to the offender, 3% (4) reported that the victim did not object, 5% (6) listed other reactions, and 52% (61) did not report whether the victim had objected to the offender.

Victims of sexual harassment reported feeling retaliation (for rejecting, rebuffing, or reporting the offender's behaviors) in 20% (33) of the cases in the full sample. Nine percent (14) reported fearing retaliation, and 71% (116) did not report information about feeling or fearing retaliation in the full sample. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 18% (21) felt retaliated against, 10% (12) feared retaliation, and 72% (85) of the cases did not provide this information.

Although most of the victims in this sample had chosen Social Actions as the channel through which to process their formal complaints, some victims had first contacted other channels to complain. Sixty percent (98) of the reports in the full sample stated that the victim had contacted another channel to complain before visiting Social Actions, while 7% (12) of the reports specifically mentioned that no other channels had been contacted. There was insufficient information to code this variable in 33% (53) of the cases in the full sample. In the subsample of confirmed cases, 58% (68) mentioned that the victim complained to other channels, 9% (10) reported no visits to other channels, and 34% (40) of the cases did not contain this information. The most frequent alternative channel for complaints was the victim's chain of command. In the full sample, 49% (80) of the cases included reports through the chain of command, although some of the victims noted that the use of this channel did not bring about the desired results (which is why they then turned to Social Actions). Twelve percent (19) of the cases included reports to informal support networks (such as family, friends, and co-workers). Eight percent of these cases also included reports to other sources including Staff Judge Advocates, Security Police, and the Housing Referral Office. The use of these sources indicates that some sexual harassment complaints are made to agencies appropriate to the specific incident.

Summary. As has been found in research with civilian samples, the most frequent sexual harassment behaviors tended to be less severe than the least frequently seen behaviors. Multiple behaviors on the part of an offender, who usually acted alone (and who may have harassed others), are additional characteristics of both civilian and (the present) military samples. This pattern of repeated incidents of less severe behaviors may contribute to the negative climate that characterizes the "hostile environment" type of sexual harassment.

The percentage of victims who objected to their harasser in this sample (40%) is also very close to the percentage of female victims (44%) who reported this reaction in the most recent USMSPB (1988) survey of sexual harassment among Federal workers. However, the USMSPB sample also showed that very few (5%) of the victims actually took formal actions about these situations.

#### Characteristics of the complaint process

The only variable related to the complaint process that could be coded was the amount of time taken to process these complaints. It was originally planned to code the difference between the date the complaint was filed and the date on which the complainant was notified of the outcome. However, as these dates were often sanitized in the received cases, the earliest

and latest dates from the "Actions Taken" section (#20) of AF Form 1587 were sometimes used to estimate the length of this process. Table 7 provides a frequency distribution of the time taken to investigate and resolve the complaint process.

Table 7

Percentages and Frequencies of the Time Taken to Process a Sexual Harassment Complaint for Full and Confirmed Samples

Length of Time	Full Sample		Confirmed Sample	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage*	Frequency
1 Month (1-30 days)	27%	44	24%	28
2 Months (31-60 days)	15%	24	17%	20
3 Months (61-91 days)	7%	12	7%	8
4 Months (92-125 days)	7%	11	8%	9
5 Months (126-153 days)	3%	5	4%	5
6 Months (154-195 days)	1%	2	2%	2
More than 6 mos. (196-380 days)	4%	6	3%	4
No Information	36%	59	36%	42
Total	100%	163	101%	118

\* Percentage totals to greater than 100% due to rounding.

The length of time taken to process these sexual harassment complaints ranged from 1 to 380 days. In the full sample, the modal number of days to process a complaint was 21, and the largest number of cases (44, or 27%) were processed within 30 days. In the subsample of confirmed cases, the modal number of days to process a complaint was slightly higher at 25, with the largest number of confirmed cases (28, or 24%) being processed within 30 days.

## Characteristics of the Complaint Outcomes

Sexual harassment was confirmed in 72% (118) of the cases in this sample. This is greater than the 58% confirmation rate for the entire population of 235 sexual harassment complaints, from which this sample was taken.

Complainant satisfaction with action taken. The complainant was usually satisfied with the action taken in these cases, even when discrimination was not confirmed. In the full sample, 67% (110) of the cases listed the complainant as being satisfied, while 11% (18) were not satisfied. There was no information about whether the complainant was satisfied in 21% (35) of the cases, some of which was due to the complainant's leaving the service and also because of anonymous complaints. In the sub-sample of confirmed cases, 71% of the complainants were satisfied with the actions taken, while 8% (10) were not. There was no information about this variable in 20% (24) of the confirmed cases.

Actions taken when discrimination was confirmed. A frequency distribution of the actions taken when discrimination was confirmed is provided in Table 8. Please note that this table does not contain information about actions taken when discrimination was not confirmed (see below for details). The most frequent actions taken when discrimination was confirmed were written reprimands, Article 15's, removal from command/supervisory positions, establishing unfavorable information files, and verbal reprimands.

Actions were also sometimes taken even when discrimination was not confirmed. In this sample, 9% (14) of the cases listed actions, such as verbal reprimands, even when discrimination was not found (because the incident was indicative of "management problems" or "unprofessional conduct").

Summary. The range of times taken to resolve the cases in this military sample was similar to that found in the Coles (1986) study, which was the only civilian study to assess this variable.

This sample was also similar to the Coles study in other ways. For example, although the relatively high confirmation rate of this sample of cases did not correspond with the rate of the population from which these cases were received, the 58% confirmation rate for the population of cases in FY 1987 is similar to the 53% settlement rate reported by Coles (1986). However, even this was greater than the proportion of cases found for the complainant (31%) in the Terpstra and Cook (1985) study of complaints.

Table 8

Percentages and Frequencies of Actions Taken When Discrimination  
Was Confirmed

Action Taken	Percentage*	Frequency
Written Reprimand	35%	57
Article 15	15%	24
Removal from COMD/SUPV	12%	20
Unfavorable Information File	12%	20
Verbal Reprimand	10%	16
Comments on APR/OER	6%	10
Verbal Counseling	6%	9
Letter of Counseling	3%	5
H.R. Education	3%	5
Reduction in Status or Rank	3%	4
Discharge (or accelerated dis.)	3%	4
Letter of Admonishment	2%	3
Retired (or accelerated ret.)	1%	2
Alcohol Rehabilitation	1%	2
Suspension of Nonjudicial Punishment	1%	2
Apology	1%	2
Control Roster	1%	2
Removal from Area	1%	2
Fines, Forfeitures, Suspended Pay	1%	1
Denied Higher Endorsement	1%	1
Court Martial	1%	1
Write an Article for the Paper	1%	1
Issue Addressed/Commander's Call	1%	1
Offender Left Service	1%	1
Other	7%	12

\* Percentage totals to greater than 100% due to multiple actions per case.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine 163 filed complaints of sexual harassment in the Air Force during FY 1987. Variables investigated included characteristics of the complainant/victim, the alleged offender, the complaint situations, the complaint process, and the outcome of the complaint.

Descriptive statistics showed that most of the victims in this sample were White, female, enlisted personnel. Most of the alleged and confirmed offenders were White, male, and also enlisted, but more often of a higher grade than the victims. Chi-square analyses revealed Blacks to be overrepresented (and Whites to be underrepresented) in the sample of alleged and confirmed male offenders. No such differences were found in this sample for female victims.

The most frequent behavior reported in this sample was "offensive language," while severe behaviors such as "sexual propositions tied to negative job consequences," and "sexual assault/rape" were among the least frequent. Most cases consisted of multiple incidents of sexual harassment, in which the offender acted alone. Alcohol was involved in 20% of the cases.

Many of the victims had contacted other channels to complain, including the use of "chain of command." Seventy-two percent of the cases in this sample were "confirmed" sexual harassment, and the most frequent action taken was a "written reprimand." However, it was also found that action was sometimes taken even when discrimination was not found.

These results show a pattern of sexual harassment in a military setting that is similar to that found in research in civilian organizations. There is also evidence that the "hostile environment" type of sexual harassment may be a problem in this sample, along with the better recognized "economic injury" type of harassment.

One of the issues that affects interpretation of these results is whether some of these results are due to actual differences in the receipt of sexual harassment behaviors, or whether the reports are due to differences in perceptions about these behaviors. Terpstra and Cook (1985) first broached this issue of "perception" versus "reception" when discussing their finding that more educated women tended to report more sexual harassment than less educated women in an examination of civilian complaints.

The question of perception versus reception may be applied to the interpretation of several of the major findings of the present study. It has already been noted that the finding of more reports of sexual harassment by supervisors than co-workers

in these (and civilian) complaints is at odds with the finding in survey studies that co-worker harassment is actually more prevalent. This may be due to a perceptual bias in which supervisor harassment behavior is considered to be more serious than the same behavior exhibited by a co-worker (and more likely to result in a formal complaint).

Another finding in which perception versus reception is an issue is the overrepresentation of Blacks among male offenders in this sample. This result could be due to victims' actually receiving proportionately more sexual harassment behaviors from Blacks (than from other race/ethnic groups), or it could be that victims may perceive particular behaviors exhibited by a Black male as more definitely sexual harassment than the same behavior exhibited by a White male.

A third finding for which interpretation is not clear concerns the incidence of pregnant victims of sexual harassment. It is not possible at this time to know whether the incidence of pregnant victims in this sample is under- or overrepresentative of the incidence of pregnancy among the population of Air Force members. Any interpretation of this finding would also involve the issue of whether pregnant victims actually received more sexual harassment behaviors than other women or whether they were more sensitive in their perception of these behaviors as sexual harassment.

#### Limitations of the Present Study

Interpretation and generalization of these results must also take into account the limitations of the study. These limitations include the characteristics of the sample and the coding/analysis process, as well as the issue of filed complaints versus actual incidence of sexual harassment.

The sample of sexual harassment complaints used in this study included 69% of the number of cases filed during FY 1987. This number is large enough to consider the sample to be representative of the population of complaints filed in that year. However, not all of the characteristics of the sample matched those of the population. For example, the confirmation rate of the cases in the sample was higher than that in the population of complaints. It is also possible that some of the received cases were not actually part of FY 1987, but selective sanitization of dates made that difficult to determine, so all received cases (with the exception of the cases mentioned earlier, that were clearly not sexual harassment) were used in the analyses.

Differential sanitization and missing information also contributed to coding problems that may affect the results. Interrater reliability estimates were at an acceptable level for this study, but the use of a single individual as researcher,

coder, editor, and analyst is a potential source of bias for the interpretation and generalization of these results.

Because generalizability is a goal of this research, it is important to note that these filed complaints probably represent a fraction of the actual incidence of sexual harassment in the Air Force. The most recent USMSPB (1988) survey of Federal workers found that only 5% of the victims of sexual harassment took formal action. Due to the similarities between the results of this military sample and the findings of research on civilian organizations, a similar proportion of complaints/incidents may also hold in the military setting.

### Implications

The results of this examination of sexual harassment complaints have provided information on the characteristics of sexual harassment complaints in the Air Force. Although there are limits to the generalizability of this information, it should provide some guidelines for training objectives that more accurately reflect the characteristics of sexual harassment in this population. For example, the types of behaviors reported in these complaints show the "hostile environment" type of sexual harassment to be an area of concern, especially since it is often not as well recognized a problem as the "economic injury" type of harassment. Sexual harassment training programs can be adjusted to reflect findings such as these.

Sexual harassment training can also benefit from another issue raised by this research: that of perception versus reception. The perceptual nature of sexual harassment is what has made this such a difficult phenomenon to control. It is important that training not be limited just to awareness of sexual harassment as a problem. This training should also include experiential elements that allow the trainee to explore his/her perceptual biases about sexual harassment. Experiential training can include exercises in which trainees can determine if she/he perceives the same behavior as sexual harassment when exhibited by one person, but not by another; or, if the trainee finds him/herself perceiving another person in certain situations more in terms of sex role than work role.

Establishing effective training objectives also requires continued awareness of the changing characteristics of sexual harassment. Documentation of the characteristics of these incidents, such as that provided by the Air Force Social Actions reports examined in the present study, can provide essential information about sexual harassment that can be used in training to reduce the rate of such incidents.

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APPENDIX A

BRANCH OF SERVICE; AF=1; ARMY-2; NAVY=3; MARINES=4; CG=5  
CASE NO. 000-999

A. 3. COMPLAINANT AFSC

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B. 6. COMPLAINANT GRADE  
Officer = 01 to 06  
Enlisted = 21 to 29  
Warrant Officer = 31 to 34  
Civilian = 40  
Other = 41  
No grade listed = 99

C. 7/8 COMP. RACE/ETHNIC GROUP  
American Indian = 1  
Alaskan Native = 1  
Asian American = 2  
Pacific Islander = 2  
Black (non-Hisp) = 3  
Hispanic = 4  
White (non-Hisp) = 5  
Other/Unknown = 6

D. 9. COMPLAINANT SEX  
Male = 1  
Female = 2  
No info = 9

E. 10b. SUPERVISOR'S GRADE  
Officer = 01 to 06  
Enlisted = 21 to 29  
Warrant Officer = 31 to 34  
Civilian = 40  
Other = 41

F. 11. NATURE OF COMPLAINT  
Sexual Harassment = 1  
Personal Discrimination = 2  
Other = 3  
No info = 0

G. 12. COMPLAINT AREA  
Supervisor = 1  
Classmate/Co-worker = 2  
Individual = 3  
Other = 4  
No info = 4

H. 13. TYPE OF DISCRIMINATION  
01 Sexual Harassment = 0/1  
02 Sex = 0/1  
03 Race = 0/1  
04 Other = 0/1  
No info = 0000

I. 14. OFFENDER RACE/ETHNIC GROUP  
 American Indian = 1  
 Alaskan Native = 1  
 Asian American = 2  
 Pacific Islander = 2  
 Black (non-Hisp) = 3  
 Hispanic = 4  
 White (non-Hisp) = 5  
 Other/Unknown = 6

J. OFFENDER SEX  
 Male = 1  
 Female = 2  
 No info = 9

K. OFFENDER GRADE  
 Officer = 01 to 06  
 Enlisted = 21 to 29  
 Warrant Officer = 31 to 34  
 Civilian = 40  
 Other = 41  
 No grade listed = 99

L. OFFENDER DUTY AFSC

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M. 15/19 NATURE OF COMPLAINT  
 IS COMPLAINANT THE VICTIM?  
 Yes = 1  
 No = 2  
 Other = 3  
 No info = 0

(1=yes; 0=no)

01	Sexual assault or rape: Actual	0/1
02	Sexual assault or rape: Attempted	0/1
03	Sexual proposition tied to neg. job outcome	0/1
04	Sexual proposition tied to pos. job outcome	0/1
05	Sexual proposition unlinked to job outcome	0/1
06	Socialization/date request	0/1
07	Unwanted physical contact (sexual in nature)	0/1
08	Offensive language (obscenities/sexual comments)	0/1
09	Unwanted nonverbal attention (sexual in nature)	0/1
10	Unwanted letters, calls, gifts (sexual in nature)	0/1
11	"Complimentary" comments that make victim feel uncomfortable (re: appearance, attractiveness)	0/1
12	Sexual Climate: sexual comments, pictures, magazines, <u>not</u> directed to victim	0/1
13	Sexism: sexist comments, gestures, <u>not</u> of a sexual nature	0/1
14	Other: list	0/1
	No info 00000000000000	

- N. DOES VICTIM FEEL RETALIATED AGAINST? Yes = 1  
No = 2  
Other = 3  
No info = 0
- O. NUMBER OF INCIDENTS REPORTED (Against victim/s) No info = 0  
Single incident = 1  
2 or more = 2
- P. DURATION OF BEHAVIOR Less than one week = 1  
Several weeks = 2  
1 to 6 months = 3  
More than 6 months = 4  
No info = 0
- Q. DID THE OFFENDER ACT ALONE (Was she/he only one listed) Yes = 1  
No, but only one charged = 2  
No, and other charged = 3  
Other = 4  
No info = 0
- R. DID THE OFFENDER HARASS OTHERS? (Only if listed) Yes, but only one comp. = 1  
Yes, and multiple comp. = 2  
No = 3  
Other = 4  
No info = 0
- S. HAS VIC/COMP TOLD OFFENDER THAT SHE/HE OBJECTS? Victim has objected = 1  
Victim hasn't objected = 2  
Other = 3  
No info = 0
- T. HAS VIC/COMP CONTACTED OTHER CHANNELS TO COMPLAIN? Yes, victim has = 1  
No, victim has not = 2  
Other = 3  
No info = 0

If yes, WHAT CHANNELS?

- 01 Chain of Command = 0/1  
02 Inspector General = 0/1  
03 EO staff = 0/1  
04 Chaplain = 0/1  
05 Legal counsel = 0/1  
06 Local crisis line = 0/1  
07 Women's shelter/support = 0/1  
08 Informal support network = 0/1  
(i.e., family, friends)  
09 Congressional representation = 0/1  
10 Other = 0/1  
No info

If no, WHY NOT?

11	Offender in chain =	0/1
12	Feeling of hostility in Chain of Command =	0/1
13	Fear retaliation =	0/1
14	It would have no effect =	0/1
15	Did not know what to do =	0/1
16	Other =	0/1
	No info	

U. WERE THERE ANY WITNESSES?

Yes = 1
No = 2
Other = 3
Possibly = 4
Other victims/offenders = 5
No info = 0

V. OFFENDER/VICTIM SAME SEX?

Male harassing female = 1
Female harassing male = 2
Female harassing female = 3
Male harassing male = 4
No info = 9

W. OFFENDER/VICTIM SAME RACE?

Nonminority harassing minority = 1
Minority harassing nonminority = 2
Nonminority harassing nonminority = 3
Minority harassing minority = 4
No info = 9

X. OFFENDER/VICTIM SAME GRADE?

Higher harassing lower = 1
Lower harassing higher = 2
Same grade = 3
Other = 4
No info = 9

Y. MARTIAL STATUS OF VICTIM

Married = 1
Single = 2
Divorced = 3
Widowed = 4
No info = 9

Z. MARITAL STATUS OF OFFENDER

Married = 1
Single = 2
Divorced = 3
Widowed = 4
No info = 9

AA. REACTION OF VICTIM

01	Ignored the behavior = (hoped it would stop)	0/1
02	Avoided the person =	0/1
03	Asked the person to stop =	0/1
04	Threatened to tell or told other workers =	0/1
05	Other = No info	0/1

BB. IMPACT ON WORK ENVIRONMENT?

	Positive = 1	
	Negative = 2	
	No impact = 3	
	No info = 0	

CC. 20. ACTIONS TAKEN

	Time period (in days) 000-000	
	(start to finish)	

DD. 21. LEGAL COORDINATION

	Concurrence with legal?	
01	YES: Inquiry/Investigation needed =	0/1
02	NO: Inquiry/Investigation not needed due to insufficient probability that sexual harassment has occurred =	0/1
03	NO: Inquiry not needed as the "clarification process" suffices to confirm sexual harassment and to take action against offender =	0/1
04	OTHER =	0/1
05	Legal concurs with actions =	0/1
06	N/A; case handled by Commander =	0/1
07	Legal does not concur = NO INFO	0/1 0000000

EE. 24. REVIEW COMMENTS OF CHIEF SL

01	SA finds there is discrimination =	0/1
02	SA finds there is <u>no</u> discrimination =	0/1
03	Social Actions nonconcurs with inquiry or investigation which does not substantiate sexual harassment =	0/1
04	Social Actions recommends further inquiry investigation due to insufficiency in first report (failed to address all allegations, all potential witnesses, etc.) =	0/1
05	SA recommends counseling even though discrimination was not found =	0/1
06	OTHER = No info	0/1 0000000

FF. 25. DISCRIMINATION CONFIRMED?  
 Yes = 1  
 No = 2  
 Other = 3  
 No info = 0

GG. 27. SATISFACTION WITH ACTION TAKEN  
 Complainant satisfied = 1  
 Complainant not satisfied = 2  
 Complainant left service = 3  
 Other = 4  
 No info/Unknown = 0

HH. 30. ACTION TAKEN WHEN DISCRIMINATION CONFIRMED

01	Verbal reprimand =	0/1
02	Written reprimand =	0/1
03	Article 15 =	0/1
04	Removal from COMD/SUPV =	0/1
05	Complainant left service =	0/1
06	Offender left service =	0/1
07	Comments on APR/OER	
08	UIF	
09	Other =	0/1
	No info	

II. 31. FOLLOWUP COMPLETION ACTION

01	Victim reported some retribution =	0/1
02	Victim reported no retribution from filing the complaint =	0/1
03	Other =	0/1
04	Action taken even though discrimination <u>not</u> found =	0/1
	No info	0000

JJ. SITE OF COMPLAINT

01	On the job =	0/1
02	Off the job =	0/1

KK. COMMAND # \_\_\_\_\_ APO (1)/CONUS (2) \_\_\_\_\_

LL. ALCOHOL INVOLVED?  
 Yes = 1  
 No/No info = 0  
 Possibly = 3

MM. PREGNANCY INVOLVED?  
 Yes = 1  
 No/No info = 0c