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**SEXUAL HARASSMENT  
AND ASSAULT**

***Chilling the Climate for Women  
in Academia***

Lilia M. Cortina  
*University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign*

Suzanne Swan  
*Yale University*

Louise F. Fitzgerald  
*University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign*

Craig Waldo  
*University of California, San Francisco*

An extensive body of literature has documented the widespread and damaging nature of sexual harassment and assault on college campuses, yet little research has investigated the impact of such victimization on the academic climate. This study examined experiences of sexual harassment and assault among 1,037 female undergraduate and graduate students, with a particular focus on educational outcomes. Multivariate analyses of variance revealed significant negative effects of harassment and assault on perceptions of academic climate. We also investigated the extent and effects of double victimization (i.e., experiences of both

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Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Lilia M. Cortina, Department of Psychology, 603 East Daniel Street, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL 61820. Email: lcortina@s.psych.uiuc.edu.

harassment and assault), as well as the relationships among sexual harassment types, incidence rates, and frequencies. Issues of sexual orientation and race/ethnicity are explored throughout the article, with membership in different groups affecting victimization incidence rates as well as harassment labeling.

You come in the door . . . equal but experiencing the discrimination—the refusal of professors to take you seriously, the sexual overtures, and the like—you limp out doubting your own abilities to do much of anything.

—female doctoral student, Harvard University (quoted in Hall & Sandler, 1982, p. 1)

Many questions about the death of Maria G. will remain forever unanswered . . . [A male biochemistry student] abducted Mrs. G. as she was walking to her car, took her into a nearby basement, bound her arms, gagged her with duct tape, raped her, and strangled her with his own hands.

—murder committed in the University of Illinois Social Work Building, October 31, 1995 (Bauer, 1995, p. A1)

In the early 1980s, Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler introduced the concept of the “chilly climate,” giving a name to the manifold slights and indignities that combine to relegate women students to the margins of the academic enterprise (Hall & Sandler, 1982, 1984, 1986). This institutional climate or environment plays a critical role for women in either fostering full academic, professional, and personal development or undermining self-esteem, educational progress, and subsequent career success. Hall and Sandler underscored the importance of this issue by noting that increasing enrollment patterns of female students have transformed higher education over the past few decades; the education of women is now a central goal of postsecondary institutions. However, as research reveals (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987), sexual victimization on university campuses continues to chill the learning environment for this new majority of college students.

Misogynist comments, displays of pornographic pictures, unwanted pressure for dates, sexual coercion and sexual assault reflect the sexism and victimization women encounter at universities nationwide. This article examines the extent and impact of these experiences—specifically, sexual harassment and sexual assault—on one typical American campus, presenting what we believe to be the first empirical data on relationships between victimization and the academic climate. We also argue that, rather than overestimating such experiences as claimed by some (e.g., Roiphe, 1993), many current figures are actually *underestimates*, failing as they do to consider total risk aggregated over the typical four-year exposure period as well as the combined probability of experiencing multiple forms of victimization.

### Rates of Sexual Victimization on Campus

Research has indicated that harassment from male faculty is widespread on college campuses, with one out of every two female students estimated to experience some form of sexually harassing behavior during her years in school (Brooks & Perot,

1991; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Schneider, 1987). High rates of sexual assault profoundly exacerbate the problem: 27 to 33% of undergraduate women are sexually assaulted while in college (Koss et al., 1987; Lott, Reilly, & Howard, 1982; Miller & Marshall, 1987; Wilson & Durrenberger, 1982).

Interacting with the vulnerability coded by gender, membership in various minority groups has been hypothesized to affect rates of sexual harassment and assault. For example, the prevalence of sexual harassment may vary as a function of sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Homophobia and heterosexism could fuel harassment of lesbians and bisexual women, with some heterosexual men viewing them as sexual novelties or women who need to be "set straight." Although sexual harassment of lesbian and bisexual students has yet to be examined empirically, D'Augelli (1988) and Schneider (1982) have found that such women are more frequently victimized in the workplace than their heterosexual colleagues.

Similarly, it has been argued that race-based stereotypes, lack of social power, numerical minority status, cultural marginality, and economic vulnerability may increase risk of harassment for women of color (DeFour, 1990; MacKinnon, 1979; Murrell, 1996). Although these propositions are intuitively reasonable, they are typically overly general, failing to consider important cultural differences that influence the experiences of ethnic minority groups; what few data do exist do not consistently support the "double jeopardy" hypothesis. For example, Gutek's (1985) and the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's (1987) large-scale surveys identified no overall differences in harassment rates between White women and women of color. Other studies have reported that non-Hispanic White women experience sexual harassment less frequently than African American women (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982, 1986; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994) yet more often than Hispanic women (Cortina, Shupe, Ramos, Buchanan, & Trujillo, 1996). Thus, no firm conclusions can be drawn regarding the effects of ethnicity on harassment. Further, such studies are limited to the experiences of employed women, as no data yet exist on the harassment of students of different ethnicities.

Similar ambiguities characterize the literature on sexual assault. Little empirical research exists comparing assault rates by sexual orientation. Schneider (1991) reported workplace assault rates of lesbians and heterosexual women, but no statistical comparisons between groups were conducted. Likewise, studies of the prevalence of attempted and completed rape of ethnic minority women have yielded mixed results. Sorenson and colleagues reported lower rates of sexual assault among Hispanic women compared to non-Hispanic White women (Sorenson & Siegel, 1992; Sorenson, Stein, Siegel, Golding, & Siegel, 1987), and Wyatt (1992) found no difference in rape frequencies among African American and European American women. Koss and colleagues (1987) reported what are perhaps the only published figures on the prevalence of sexual aggression and assault among ethnic minority students, finding statistically significant differences: Native Americans reported the highest levels of victimization, followed by White, Latina, Black, and Asian women. These various studies provide, at best, only modest support for the hypothesis that ethnic minority women are at heightened risk for sexual assault. Thus, the effects of minority status on the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault remain unclear.

## Academic Outcomes of Sexual Victimization

It has become commonplace to assert that sexual harassment presents a serious threat to women's academic and workplace pursuits (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita, & Russo, 1994), and such assertions appear quite reasonable on their face. University faculty, particularly at the graduate level, exert tremendous influence over students' academic progress and subsequent career success. When professors and instructors abuse this power and sexual harassment ensues, such exploitation becomes deeply entangled in the educational process. Nevertheless, few studies of sexual harassment have actually examined the damage that harassment can wreak on women's educational pursuits. A number of studies have documented that harassment frequently results in avoidance of the professor in question—avoidance that can take multiple forms—all damaging to the student (e.g., dropping classes, changing advisors, withdrawing from school) (Anonymous, 1992; Bailey & Richards, 1985; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986; Schneider, 1987). Benson and Thompson (1982) found harassed women reporting not only selective avoidance but also lowered confidence, disillusionment with male faculty, and inappropriately negative evaluations of their work (i.e., retaliation) by the faculty member involved. One narrative recounted by a counseling graduate student described such outcomes as impaired concentration, interference in therapy supervision, and an overall scholastic decline (Anonymous, 1991).

Although providing important preliminary data on academic consequences of sexual harassment, these studies suffer from a variety of methodological problems. Some are based on anecdotal accounts of small numbers of victims (Anonymous, 1991, 1992; Benson & Thompson, 1992; Reilly et al., 1986), whereas others used outcome checklists of very limited scope (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Bailey & Richards, 1985; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Schneider, 1987). No study employed objective outcome instruments of known validity and reliability, and each relied on different (and sometimes inadequate) measures of sexually harassing behaviors. In sum, no study to date has explored the academic impact of sexual harassment using comprehensive samples, psychometrically sound instruments, and adequate detail.

With respect to sexual assault, considerable research has examined not only prevalence rates but also resulting emotional and physical damage. For example, extensive work has documented the psychological and somatic sequelae of rape, including negatively altered self-schemas, disordered eating, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. In addition, many victims experience impairment in the sexual, work, social, and family realms (for a review, see Koss et al., 1994). Although it seems likely that such effects may extend into other important life domains such as education, no studies have yet investigated the ramifications of sexual assault on women's academic experiences.

## Double Victimization

Finally, given that approximately one half of women students experience sexual harassment and around one quarter to one third are sexually assaulted, there is almost certainly considerable overlap between these groups; the two types of

experiences may have additive or even interactive effects on outcomes. Indeed, Frazier and Cohen (1992) documented a significantly higher incidence of sexual harassment in a community sample of assault victims as compared with nonvictims, and Wyatt and Riederle (1994) found differential job-related and psychological outcomes for women who were harassed and those who had a history of double victimization. Nevertheless, research has yet to shed light on the incidence and effects of double victimization among college women.

### Current Study

The current study attempts to fill these lacunae in the literature as well as to corroborate past findings on the characteristics and effects of sexual victimization in academia. Specifically, undergraduate and graduate women students' experiences of sexual harassment and assault are explored in detail. In addition, the impact of harassment and assault on academic pursuits is investigated. Throughout the article we examine sexual orientation and race/ethnicity to determine how, if at all, they affect women students' experiences of sexual victimization in academia.

## METHOD

The findings described here are based on a study of institutional climate conducted at a large Midwestern university. The intent of the larger study was to examine attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of groups that have been traditionally marginalized in higher education: women, ethnic and racial minorities, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. The current article reports results from female respondents.

### Sample

Based on university records, the student body of a large university was classified by status (undergraduate and graduate), gender, and race/ethnicity. The study employed stratified random sampling procedures, with certain groups of interest oversampled. Due to the greater proportion of undergraduates at the university, approximately twice as many undergraduates as graduates were surveyed; in addition women in male-dominated departments (i.e., engineering, chemical sciences, life sciences, and math) as well as ethnic/racial minorities were proportionately oversampled to provide sufficient numbers for meaningful statistical analysis. Because relatively few respondents were expected to self-identify on the survey as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, a snowball sampling technique was employed to supplement this group. Following procedures recommended by D'Augelli (1989, 1992) and Herek (1994), friendship and other networks were used to sample across groups within the lesbian/gay/bisexual community.

The final sample contained 1,037 female participants (651 undergraduate, 386 graduate). Of these 1,037 women, 356 identified as White/European American, 204 as Asian American or Pacific Islander, 135 as International, 118 as Latina, 98

as African American, 65 as Bicultural, 26 as East Indian, 2 as Native American, and 11 as "Other."<sup>1</sup> Forty-five women self-identified as either lesbian or bisexual, whereas 966 identified as heterosexual.<sup>2</sup>

## Procedure

Surveys were printed on computer-scannable forms to facilitate data entry and mailed to participants via first class mail.<sup>3</sup> Slightly different versions of the survey were developed (for undergraduate and graduate participants) and color-coded for easy identification. Procedures recommended by Dillman (1978) were employed to maximize the return rate, including follow-up reminder post cards to all sampled students at specified intervals and, subsequently, the mailing of a second survey to nonrespondents. To identify nonrespondents, students were tracked via randomly generated identification numbers on the surveys; a separate database linked these numbers to students, and this linkage was destroyed at the conclusion of the study to protect participants' confidentiality. The return rate was 48% for the undergraduate and 60% for the graduate women; the snowball sample yielded a return rate of 53%. Undergraduates were less likely to respond to the survey compared to graduate students [ $\chi^2(1) = 94.39, p < .001$ ]. Significant differences were also found among the four largest ethnic minority groups for both undergraduate [ $\chi^2(5) = 137.10, p < .001$ ] and graduate students [ $\chi^2(5) = 41.01, p < .001$ ]: Asian Americans were most likely to respond, followed by European Americans, Latinos, and African Americans. However, there was no return-rate difference between the stratified random sample and the snowball sample.

## Quantitative Measures

*Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Short Form.* Participants' experiences of sexual harassment were assessed via the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Short Form (SEQ-s), an abbreviated version of the original Sexual Experiences Questionnaire developed by Fitzgerald and colleagues (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Fitzgerald et al., 1988). This measure has demonstrated excellent reliability and correlates with self-reports of sexual harassment in theoretically expected ways: it is generally considered the most theoretically and psychometrically sophisticated instrument available for assessing incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995; Beere, 1990; Fitzgerald et al., 1995). The SEQ-s contained eight behavioral items assessing experiences of three broad categories of sexually harassing behaviors: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Gender harassment (3 items) consists of behaviors targeting women because of their gender and conveys sexist, misogynistic, and offensive attitudes (e.g., insults, crude comments, sexual remarks). Unwanted sexual attention (3 items) includes unwanted touching or repeated requests for dates or sexual behavior. Sexual coercion (1 item) refers to implicit or explicit demands for sexual favors in return for the avoidance of negative consequences. The final item—"Have you ever been sexually harassed?"—is considered a criterion item designed to measure respondents' labeling of their experiences. Thus, the words "sexual harassment"

did not appear until the end of the scale, reducing demand characteristics and increasing reliability.<sup>4</sup> Instructions asked respondents to indicate whether they had experienced any of the behaviors from a male professor or instructor during their time at the university using a 5-point Likert-type response scale, ranging from 1 "never" to 5 "most of the time." Cronbach's alpha for the SEQ-s was 0.85.

*Sexual Experiences Scale.* Items drawn from Koss and colleagues' (Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Koss & Oros, 1982) Sexual Experiences Scale (SES) measured participants' experiences of attempted and completed sexual assault. The SES spans a continuum of sexual aggression, but only those items referring explicitly to attempted or completed vaginal rape based on physical force or threat of physical force were used in the present study. The word "rape" did not appear in the scale. The resulting 4-item scale used a yes/no response format, and instructions emphasized that answers should refer only to incidents that occurred at the university. Cronbach's alpha for the SES-s was measured at 0.61; in Koss and Gidycz' (1985) original sample, based on the full scale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.74.

*General Campus Climate.* The General Campus Climate scale (GCC) was developed for the current project to assess general academic climate on campus. Various campus groups (e.g., Women in Science and Engineering, Office of Women's Programs) reviewed the item content to ensure that the scale tapped into issues relevant to women's experiences at the university, and the scale was then piloted on undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology course. Items were written in both positive and negative directions, scaled in a 7-point Likert-type response format from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," and scored so that higher scores represented more positive evaluations of general campus climate. To avoid priming effects, the GCC scale appeared before the victimization scales in the survey. Slightly different versions were developed for undergraduate and graduate students, referred to as GCC-u and GCC-g, respectively. For purposes of data reduction, the GCC was submitted to a principal components analysis with varimax rotation, supplemented by a complete-link cluster analysis, to identify subscales with homogenous items.<sup>5</sup>

For the undergraduate form (GCC-u), the analysis yielded five substantively meaningful subscales. The Instructor subscale (6 items) assessed respondents' perceptions of treatment by faculty in the academic setting (e.g., "My instructors view me as a serious student"). The Acceptance subscale (5 items) gauged "fitting in" or feeling interpersonally comfortable ("I feel somewhat out of place in the classroom"). The Confidence subscale (5 items) measured respondents' confidence in their own academic competence (e.g., "I am progressing as well as other students in my major"). The Respect subscale (2 items) assessed perceptions of fair or respectful treatment on campus (e.g., "I have been treated unfairly on this campus"), whereas the Safety subscale (2 items) pertained to personal safety on campus grounds (e.g., "I feel safe walking on campus grounds").

The graduate version (GCC-g) also initially yielded five similar subscales. The first of these contained items relating to advisors, as well as faculty more generally. A cluster analysis with complete linkage suggested that this subscale could be further separated into two distinct subscales. Of the final six subscales, the Faculty (6 items) and Advisor (4 items) subscales referred to perceptions of and experiences

with professors (e.g., "I have had faculty encourage me to work with them") and academic/research advisors (e.g., "My advisor sets aside sufficient time for me"), respectively. The Fairness subscale (7 items) assessed experiences of fair or friendly treatment from others on campus (e.g., "When I try to speak up in classes or meetings, I am sometimes ignored or interrupted"). The Confidence, Respect, and Safety subscales (5, 3, 2 items, respectively) were similar to their undergraduate counterparts. Cronbach's alphas for the majority of the GCC-u and GCC-g subscales exceeded .70, demonstrating good internal consistency.

*Gender Experiences.* The GE scale assessed treatment of women and gender issues by faculty and other students, as perceived by the respondents. Items for this scale were drawn from the Revised Hostility Toward Women Scale (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995) and modified to fit the university setting; additional items were written specifically for the present project, and none overlapped in content with the SEQ-s items. Items were again reviewed by various campus women's groups and piloted on undergraduates. Sample items included "Some instructors tend to ignore women students" and "My classmates sometimes use humor at the expense of women." The GE scales for the undergraduates (8 items) and graduates (5 items) were nearly identical; Cronbach's alpha equaled 0.71 and 0.70, respectively. Like the GCC, the scale used a 7-point, Likert-type response format and was scored so that higher values reflected more positive perceptions of women's experiences on campus.<sup>6</sup>

## RESULTS

### Incidence and Frequency of Sexual Harassment

All scale scores were obtained by summing item responses. Analyses of the SEQ-s revealed that 49% of undergraduate and 53% of graduate women had experienced at least one sexually harassing behavior at least "once or twice" from an instructor or professor while at the university.<sup>7</sup> Of the undergraduates, 36% reported gender harassment alone; 2% reported unwanted sexual attention alone; 10% reported experiencing both gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention; and 1% reported sexual coercion with both other types (sexual coercion never occurred in isolation). This breakdown was nearly identical for the graduate sample. Despite the prevalence of harassment, only 20% of undergraduate and 26% of graduate targets actually labeled these experiences as "sexual harassment" by responding affirmatively to the final SEQ-s item, "Have you ever been sexually harassed?"

Not surprisingly, the likelihood of sexual harassment increased with each year at the university, as demonstrated by Pearson chi-square tests [undergraduates:  $\chi^2(4) = 14.60, p < .006$ ; graduates:  $\chi^2(4) = 20.81, p < .001$ ]. Table 1 presents harassment incidence rates across years in school.

In addition to overall incidence rates, the frequency of harassment is an important indicator of the extent of the problem. To examine frequency, undergraduate women who endorsed at least one item on the SEQ-s were divided into low-,



**Table 1**  
**Incidence Rates (Percentages) of Women Who Were Sexually Victimized Across Years Spent in School**

	<i>Undergraduate<sup>a</sup></i>					<i>Graduate<sup>b</sup></i>						
	<i>Overall</i> (n = 647)	<i>1st year</i> (n = 213)	<i>2nd year</i> (n = 161)	<i>3rd year</i> (n = 138)	<i>4th year</i> (n = 110)	<i>5th year<sup>c</sup></i> (n = 25)	<i>Overall</i> (n = 377)	<i>1st year</i> (n = 78)	<i>2nd year</i> (n = 73)	<i>3rd year</i> (n = 64)	<i>4th year</i> (n = 47)	<i>5th year<sup>d</sup></i> (n = 115)
<i>Experience<sup>b</sup></i>												
Sexual Harassment	49	39	48	59	54	60	53	44	41	58	54	71
Sexual Assault	11	4	9	16	15	28	3	0	0	2	2	9
Harassment and Assault	7	2	6	12	10	16	2	0	0	2	2	7

<sup>a</sup>A total of 4 undergraduate and 9 graduate women did not disclose their year in school.

<sup>b</sup>Because some students reported more than one type of experience, numbers within each column are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>c</sup>Includes students in their fifth year and beyond.

moderate-, and high-frequency groups. Low frequency was defined as around one standard deviation below the mean SEQ-s score for harassed undergraduates; moderate-frequency scores were around the mean, and high-frequency scores were half a standard deviation or more above the mean. The mean SEQ-s score for the low-frequency group ( $n = 104$ ) indicates that these students typically experienced one harassing behavior once or twice. The moderate-frequency group ( $n = 127$ ) typically experienced several harassing behaviors, and the high-frequency group ( $n = 88$ ) experienced several harassing behaviors frequently. Parallel low-, moderate-, and high-frequency groups ( $ns = 88, 76, \text{ and } 44$ , respectively) were created for harassed graduate women, who on average were harassed more frequently than undergraduate women. The mean SEQ-s score for graduate women was half a pooled standard deviation greater than the undergraduate mean SEQ-s score. One-way ANOVAS indicated that women in traditionally male-dominated majors (i.e., engineering, chemical and life sciences, math) did not experience greater frequencies of harassment than women in other majors. This was true for both undergraduates [ $F(1, 634) = 3.34; p > .05$ ] and graduates [ $F(1, 345) = .21; p > .10$ ].

Examination of the relationship between the frequency and type of harassment further explicated the nature of this experience for women students. Nearly 100% of undergraduate and graduate women in the low-frequency groups experienced gender harassment only. In the moderate-frequency group, proportions of women encountering only gender harassment dropped (79% of undergraduate and 72% of graduate women), and 19 and 28% of undergraduate and graduate students, respectively, experienced both gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention. In the undergraduate high-frequency group, approximately half experienced gender harassment only, and about half endured gender harassment with unwanted sexual attention. Of the graduate women in the high-frequency group, only 27% experienced gender harassment in isolation, whereas nearly two thirds encountered gender harassment along with unwanted sexual attention. The number of women who endured sexual coercion remained relatively small across all frequency levels; at the highest level, less than 5% and 9% of undergraduate and graduate respondents, respectively, reported coercion.

### Effects of Minority Status

In examining responses from ethnic minority and lesbian or bisexual women, undergraduate and graduate data were combined to provide sufficient numbers for meaningful analysis. Overall harassment incidence rates were found to vary as a function of race/ethnicity [ $\chi^2(3) = 10.77, p < .01$ ]. African American women reported the highest incidence of harassment (62%), followed by Latina (60%), European American (56%), and Asian/East Indian American (46%) women. According to odds ratio analysis (Reynolds, 1977), odds were approximately 1.3 times greater that a harassed woman would be African American or Latina—and 1.2 times greater that she would be European American—than Asian American. However, harassment types and frequencies, as well as the extent that harassing behaviors were labeled “sexual harassment,” did not vary with race or ethnicity.

Sexual orientation also affected harassment experiences [ $\chi^2(1) = 15.65, p < .001$ ],

as 51% of heterosexual but 81% of lesbians or bisexual women reported at least one sexually harassing behavior. Hence, the odds of being harassed were 1.6 times greater for lesbians or bisexual women compared to heterosexuals. Types of harassing behavior experienced also varied with sexual orientation [ $\chi^2(3) = 38.138, p < .001$ ]. Specifically, 64% of lesbians or bisexual women described gender harassment, compared to 36% of heterosexual women. With respect to unwanted sexual attention, 11% of lesbians or bisexual women and 14% of heterosexual women encountered such experiences. Absolute numbers of women encountering sexual coercion were too low to make meaningful comparisons between groups. Labeling rates did not differ as a function of sexual orientation.

## Academic Correlates of Sexual Harassment

### *Undergraduate Women*

To estimate education-related correlates of sexual harassment, undergraduate women experiencing low, moderate, and high frequencies of harassment were compared on their GCC-u scores. Initial analyses revealed no differences between women reporting either low rates of harassment or none at all; thus these two groups were combined in subsequent analyses. Based on these revised groupings, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) demonstrated a significant association of harassment frequency with perceptions of academic climate [ $F(10, 1268) = 7.46, p < .001$ ]. Follow-up univariate comparisons suggested that scores on the following four GCC-u subscales varied with harassment frequency: Instructor [ $F(2, 638) = 17.35, p < .001$ ], Acceptance [ $F(2, 638) = 13.47, p < .001$ ], Respect [ $F(2, 638) = 27.65, p < .001$ ], and Safety [ $F(2, 638) = 9.15, p < .001$ ]. Figure 1 depicts these mean differences. For these four subscales, Tukey's HSD tests revealed that women reporting little or no harassment perceived a more positive environment than those reporting either moderate or high rates. In addition, on the Respect subscale, the moderate- and high-frequency groups also differed. Effect size statistics were computed using Cohen's (1977) formula, which describes sizes of effects in standard deviation units; these effects ranged in magnitude from 0.25 to 0.77, averaging 0.45.

Harassment frequency was also associated with perceptions of the treatment of women and gender on campus, as assessed by the GE scale [ $F(2, 638) = 123.453, p < .001$ ]. Tukey tests revealed that respondents who had experienced infrequent or no harassment reported perceiving more positive treatment of women on campus ( $M = 4.66$ ) compared to respondents in the moderate- ( $M = 4.02$ ) and high-frequency harassment groups ( $M = 3.34$ ); women in the moderate-frequency group also differed significantly from those in the high-frequency group. Effect sizes for these findings were quite substantial, equalling 0.85, 1.60, and 0.79 standard deviation units, respectively. Conventional levels for cutoff scores for small, moderate, and large effects are .2, .5, and .8 respectively (Cohen, 1977).

One GCC item measuring global evaluations of the university setting did not fit well into any scale and hence was analyzed individually: "If I had to do it over again, I would still attend [this university]." Endorsement of this statement varied with harassment frequency as well [ $F(2, 637) = 123.453, p < .001$ ]; women in the least victimized group agreed with the statement more strongly ( $M = 5.36$ ) than

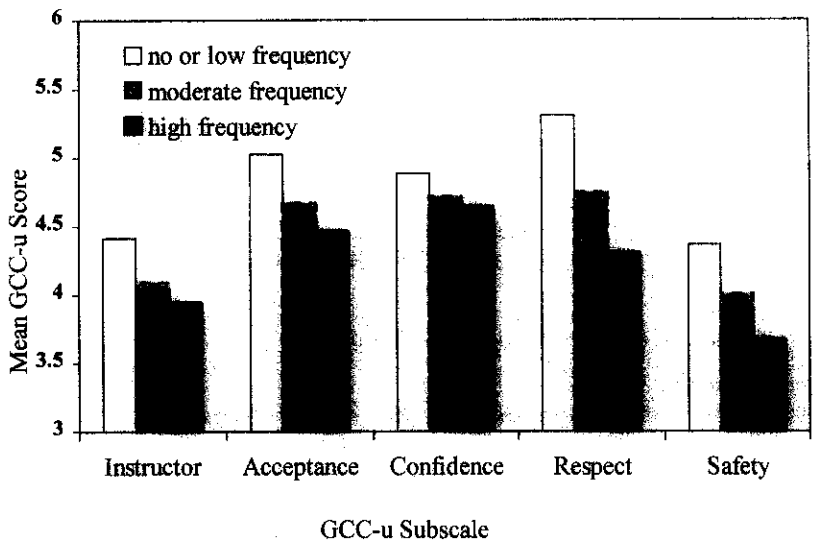


FIGURE 1. Mean GCC-u scores for undergraduate women experiencing different frequencies of sexual harassment. Mean GCC-u scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more positive ratings.

those who had experienced moderate ( $M = 4.86$ ) and high frequencies ( $M = 4.50$ ) of sexual harassment. The sizes of these effects were calculated at 0.26 and 0.44, respectively.

#### *Graduate Women*

Similar results were obtained for the graduate women. Again, harassment frequency covaried with nearly every aspect of the academic experience assessed by the GCC-g. For these women, our analysis found no differences between nonharassed women and those experiencing low frequencies of harassment or between women enduring moderate and high rates of harassment; therefore these groups were merged to form one no-low frequency group and one moderate-high frequency group. A MANOVA again revealed a multivariate main effect for harassment frequency on GCC-g responses [ $F(6, 368) = 13.13, p < .001$ ]. Univariate follow-ups revealed significant differences on the following subscales: Faculty [ $F(1, 373) = 41.87, p < .001$ ], Advisor [ $F(1, 373) = 18.34, p < .001$ ], Fairness [ $F(1, 373) = 77.99, p < .001$ ], Confidence [ $F(1, 373) = 19.52, p < .001$ ], and Respect [ $F(1, 373) = 20.75, p < .001$ ] subscales. The sizes of these effects ranged from moderate (0.32 for Advisor) to large (0.94 for Fairness), averaging 0.59. Figure 2 demonstrates that, in each case, women who had experienced little or no harassment reported significantly more positive evaluations than those who had endured moderate or high rates of harassment. No effect for Safety was found.

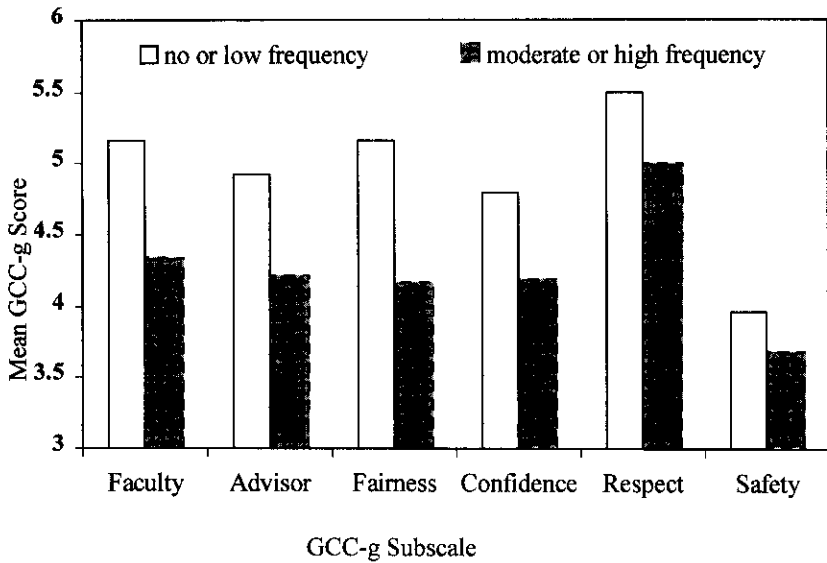


FIGURE 2. Mean GCC-g scores for graduate women experiencing different frequencies of sexual harassment. Mean GCC-g scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more positive ratings.

Similar to their undergraduate counterparts, graduate women's ratings on the GE scale differed significantly as a function of harassment frequency [ $F(1, 373) = 135.256, p < .001$ ]. Participants who reported little harassment or none at all perceived better treatment of women and gender issues on campus ( $M = 5.08$ ) compared to those who described moderate or high frequencies of harassment ( $M = 3.76$ ). The size of this effect was extremely large, equalling 1.25 standard deviation units.

In response to the item, "If I had to do it over again, I would still attend [this university]," women who had experienced little or no sexual harassment were considerably more likely to return to the university ( $M = 5.09$ ) than those who had endured moderate or high rates of harassment [ $M = 4.73; F(1, 373) = 135.26, p < .001$ ]. The effect size was large, equalling 0.59.

### Incidence of Sexual Assault

Analyses of responses to the SES-s revealed that 11% of the undergraduate women had experienced attempted or completed rape while at the university. However, these incidence rates increased significantly with the number of years spent on campus [ $\chi^2(4) = 23.67, p < .001$ ], as illustrated in Table 1. Sexual assault rates for graduate students were considerably lower, with approximately 3% of these women reporting incidents of attempted or completed rape while in graduate school.

Analyses of responses collapsed across undergraduate and graduate women revealed no differences in sexual assault rates between sexual orientations or among the four largest racial/ethnic groups.

### Academic Correlates of Sexual Assault

A MANOVA conducted on undergraduate GCC-u responses revealed significant associations between sexual assault and educational experiences. A multivariate main effect for assault emerged [ $F(5, 620) = 2.44, p < .03$ ], and univariate comparisons revealed differences on two subscales: Acceptance [ $F(1, 624) = 5.18, p < .02$ ] and Respect [ $F(1, 624) = 6.57, p < .01$ ]. Specifically, women who had experienced attempted or completed rape felt less accepted ( $M = 4.59$ , compared to 4.91 for nonassaulted women) and less respected ( $M = 4.68$ , compared to 5.12) at the university. Effect sizes equaled 0.28 and 0.31, respectively.

Differences on the GE scale also emerged, with assaulted women describing more negative treatment of women on campus ( $M = 3.87$ ) compared to nonassaulted women [ $M = 4.41; t(625) = 4.75, p < .001$ ]. The effect size for this finding was substantial (0.60). Analysis of responses to the item, "If I had to do it over again, I would still attend [this university]," revealed no significant difference between groups.

### Double Victimization

Finally, Table 1 indicates that a significant proportion of women had experienced both sexual harassment and sexual assault while at the university, with 7% of undergraduates and 2% of graduates reporting double victimization. Incidence of double victimization also increased significantly by years on campus for undergraduate students [ $\chi^2(4) = 23.15, p < .001$ ].

With respect to undergraduates' academic experiences, a MANOVA was conducted, with the GCC-u subscales as dependent variables and type of victimization (i.e., no victimization, sexual harassment, sexual assault, double victimization) as a four-level independent variable. This MANOVA uncovered a multivariate main effect of type of victimization on the GCC-u subscales [ $F(15, 1700) = 4.68, p < .001$ ]. Univariate tests then revealed significant differences on the Instructor [ $F(3, 620) = 10.79, p < .001$ ], Acceptance [ $F(3, 620) = 6.85, p < .001$ ], and Respect [ $F(3, 620) = 14.56, p < .001$ ] factors. In each case, twice victimized women reported worse experiences than nonvictimized students, with very similar effect sizes averaging 0.47. In addition, women reporting harassment and assault perceived significantly less respect than both nonvictimized women and those experiencing only sexual assault; nearly identical effect sizes averaged 0.77. Figure 3 portrays the mean differences among these groups.

In addition, undergraduate participants reporting double victimization described significantly worse treatment of women in general on campus ( $M = 3.55$ ) compared to participants experiencing either sexual harassment ( $M = 4.02$ ), assault ( $M = 4.47$ ).

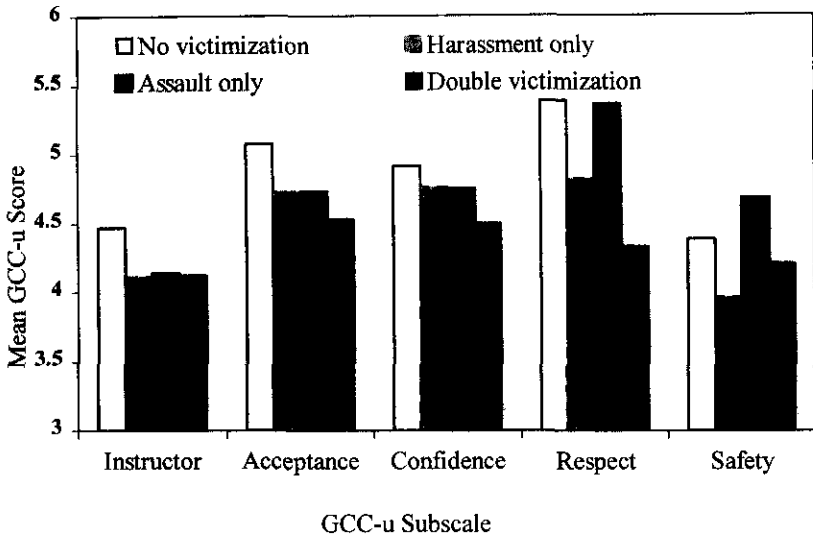


FIGURE 3. Mean GCC-u scores for undergraduate women experiencing different types of sexual victimization. Mean GCC-u scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more positive ratings.

or no victimization [ $M = 4.78$ ;  $F(3, 620) = 56.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Effect sizes for these differences ranged from moderate to extremely large, equalling 0.53, 1.19, and 1.53, respectively. Finally, undergraduate women who had endured both sexual harassment and assault in college reported being less likely to return to the university if they had to make the choice again ( $M = 4.58$ ) compared to their nonvictimized contemporaries [ $M = 5.39$ ;  $F(3, 619) = 3.729$ ,  $p < .01$ ]; the size of this effect was moderate (0.43).

## DISCUSSION

Over a decade has passed since Hall and Sandler coined the term "chilly climate," citing sexual victimization as one of many factors that contribute to an inhospitable situation for women in academia (Hall & Sandler, 1982, 1984, 1986). Nevertheless, the current study illustrates that sexual harassment and assault remain pervasive in the university environment, profoundly and negatively affecting women students' lives. We begin our discussion with sexual harassment incidence rates, types, and frequencies. Next, correlates between harassment and the academic climate are presented in detail. We then explore sexual assault rates and effects, and the section concludes with an examination of double victimization. Throughout the discussion, issues of sexual orientation and race/ethnicity are considered, and suggestions for future research are offered.

## Sexual Harassment

Corroborating past research (e.g., Brooks & Perot, 1991; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1988), we found that approximately one out of every two women students experienced some form of harassment from male instructors or professors. These numbers became even more dramatic when examined as a function of year in school: approximately 40% of undergraduate and graduate women experienced harassing behaviors in their first year at the university, yet 60% of undergraduates and over 70% of graduate students beyond their fourth year in school had endured such incidents. Several possible explanations may account for this dramatic increase. Most obviously, these findings may indicate a cumulative effect: each year spent in school allows for additional interactions with perpetrators of sexual harassment, increasing the likelihood that a woman student will be harassed. However, a cohort effect may also contribute; the data presented here were cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in nature, and fifth-year students have very different university experiences from students in their first year. For example, more advanced undergraduates tend to take smaller classes where they interact more closely with instructors and professors, and some work individually with advisors on senior theses. Advanced graduate students also work more closely with faculty when preparing masters theses and doctoral dissertations. This closer association with professors and instructors may yield a greater opportunity for sexually harassing behavior to occur. To address the issue of sexual harassment incidence over time, then, it will be important for future studies to collect longitudinal data from women students as they progress through their university years.

Despite the widespread nature of sexual harassment, only 20 to 25% of victims labeled the behaviors as sexually harassing. Although these numbers are relatively low, they are considerably higher than previous estimates based on student samples. For example, Fitzgerald and colleagues (1988) reported between 4 and 10% of their harassed respondents feeling "sexually harassed." It is possible that the experiences of our participants were objectively worse, thus leading more of them to "name" the behaviors as sexual harassment. However it seems more likely that events involving sexual harassment occurring in the early 1990s, such as the Senate confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas and the Navy's Tailhook scandal, have brought about a heightened awareness of the phenomenon. Still, the majority of women students did not recognize sexually harassing behaviors when they experienced them. Various researchers (e.g., Stockdale & Vaux, 1993) have suggested explanations for such findings, including stigma and the loss of control associated with the "victim" label; misunderstanding of sexual harassment; interpretation of harassing behaviors as humorous or flattering; or acceptance of them as "just the way things are."

Our examination of harassment frequencies (as opposed to simple incidence rates) revealed additional information concerning the pervasiveness of the problem. Of the 50% of participants who experienced some form of harassment, nearly two thirds described more than just one or two harassing incidents. On average, graduate women encountered these behaviors more often than undergraduates. The women



who reported low frequencies of harassment primarily experienced the sexist put-downs and crude remarks that pervade much of the discourse of our culture. However, as frequency of harassment increased, unwanted attention, requests for dates, and touching were added to these offensive comments. At high-frequency levels, fully 9% of graduate women described offers of rewards in return for sexual favors. It is important to note that unwanted sexual attention very rarely occurred without the crude and misogynistic behaviors that typify gender harassment, thus dispelling the common stereotype that sexual harassment is simply innocent flirting or "natural" sexual attraction.

Although the greatest risk factor for sexual harassment is clearly being female, individual characteristics did affect incidence rates to some degree. Specifically, harassment rates were related to sexual orientation; lesbian and bisexual students were much more likely to report some form of sexual harassment compared to heterosexual students, replicating Schneider's (1982) findings in the workplace. Nearly two thirds of lesbians or bisexual women experienced gender harassment; thus their disproportionately high rates of harassment predominantly entailed misogynistic comments and sexual remarks—probably driven at least in part by heterosexism and homophobia. Lesbian and bisexual students may find such behaviors more offensive than their heterosexual contemporaries—possibly because they have more feminist attitudes—and hence they may be more likely to endorse items that ask about unwanted, crude, and/or offensive experiences. Contrary to Schneider's (1982) findings, however, sexual orientation did not affect the rates at which these women labeled sexually harassing experiences, although the trend is in the expected direction. Additional research on larger student samples of lesbians or bisexual women is needed to explore these relationships more extensively.

Students' racial and ethnic backgrounds also affected harassment incidence rates. In particular, Asian Americans reported significantly fewer harassing behaviors than other women. The meaning of this finding is not immediately clear, as a variety of factors may have contributed to the difference. For example, cultural norms may have affected students' willingness to disclose information on their experiences of sexually inappropriate behaviors. Alternatively, men who harass possibly single out victims based on their race or ethnicity; as DeFour (1990) suggests, race-based stereotypes may influence such behavior. Nevertheless, the type of harassment experienced did not differ as a function of race or ethnicity; moreover, ethnicity had no effect on women's likelihood of labeling these experiences as sexual harassment.

Experiences of sexual harassment were associated with negative perceptions of the campus climate, both in terms of general academics and also with respect to the treatment of women and gender issues. It is possible that these data suggest that some students, holding relatively negative views of the university environment, were also more sensitive to and described more frequent experiences of sexual harassment, thus being more apt to complain about the campus. If this were the case, then more than 20% of these women would also have responded affirmatively to the final SEQ-s item, "Have you ever been sexually harassed?" Further, items on the SEQ-s are behaviorally defined in very explicit terms, making them less vulnerable to idiosyncratic interpretations resulting from negative biases. Hence, a more negative "outlook" on life should not predict greater endorsement of SEQ-s

items. Finally, in a number of anecdotal accounts of personal experiences of academic sexual harassment, women students have reported that such harassment is often followed by various academic consequences, such as lowered confidence, impaired concentration, and withdrawal from school (Anonymous, 1991, 1992; Benson & Thompson, 1982; Reilly et al., 1986). Thus, it seems reasonable to conceptualize our findings on negative perceptions of the university environment as outcomes, rather than antecedents, of sexual victimization.

Interpreted in this light, our data suggest that sexual harassment had a profound negative impact on both undergraduate and graduate students' educational experiences. As in previous studies (e.g., Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997), such consequences were not limited to the "horror stories" described by the few respondents with extremely severe experiences. The adverse consequences of harassment were triggered at relatively low levels, increased monotonically with frequency and had wide-ranging effects. Not only did victims perceive their faculty members more negatively (not surprising given that our items assessed harassment from faculty), but harassment also damaged students' perceptions of how others treated them at the university, including peers. Harassed women felt less respected, less accepted, and treated less fairly on campus than other women. Targets of harassment also reported worse treatment of women in general and of gender issues at the university as compared to nonharassed students. Moreover, increases in harassment frequency were associated with increases in undergraduate fears for personal safety on campus. Most important, harassment even altered graduate women's evaluations of their own academic competence; as harassment increased, so did their doubts about their own self-efficacy. Sexual harassment adversely affected these students' academic experiences to the extent that both undergraduate and graduate targets were less apt to return to the university if they had the decision to make again. Thus, academic sexual harassment not only influenced the immediate context in which it occurred but also extended into students' experiences of other important aspects of the campus climate, and these effects were uniformly negative.

### Sexual Assault

Overall, "only" 11% of undergraduate women reported experiencing sexual assault while at the university. This figure is considerably lower than rates reported in past research, which average around 30% (Koss et al., 1987; Lott et al., 1982; Miller & Marshall, 1987; Wilson & Durrenberger, 1982). We emphasize, however, that we employed a very conservative definition of rape; our assault items assessed only experiences of attempted or completed vaginal rape involving physical force. The legal definition of sexual assault also includes forced oral and anal intercourse, as well as intercourse achieved through the use of drugs or alcohol when the victim is too intoxicated to give meaningful consent. This last is among the most frequent methods of completed sexual assault on college campuses (Koss et al., 1987). Thus, our results should be considered an extremely conservative estimate of the extent of rape at the institution where our study was conducted.

Even so, examination of assault rates across cohorts yields a startling picture, as incidence of sexual assault increased directly and monotonically with time spent

on campus. Whereas 4% of first-year students had been assaulted (by spring of their freshman year), the incidence rose to 16% for third-year women and 28% for students in their fifth year or beyond. Hence, even employing such a narrow definition, we found sexual assault to be pervasive on this campus. Notably, sexual orientation and race/ethnicity did not affect sexual assault rates.

Our research suggests that negative academic consequences can be added to the already-long list of sexual assault outcomes. Undergraduates reporting attempted or completed rape described diminished feelings of respect and acceptance on campus, and they perceived a more negative climate for women and gender issues at the university. Rape victims felt no less safe on campus, most likely because virtually all participants felt unsafe. In addition, our safety items concerned issues of walking alone on campus at night; because the majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by dates and acquaintances (e.g., at fraternity parties, in dorm rooms) rather than by strangers on the street (Koss et al., 1987), it is not surprising that such assaults did not increase women's fears of attack on campus streets.

### Double Victimization

In a striking example of women's vulnerability and exposure to victimization, more than one in six undergraduate women—and nearly one in ten graduate women—had endured not only sexual harassment but also sexual assault at the university by the time they completed five years there. Moreover, such experiences among undergraduates were associated with more negative evaluations of instructor interactions, lowered feelings of acceptance on campus, and decreased academic self-confidence. Twice victimized undergraduate students differed not only from nonvictimized women, but also from those experiencing sexual harassment or assault alone, perceiving less respect from others and poorer treatment of women in general on campus. Finally, double victimization strongly reduced women's desires to return to the university.

### Limitations

Though securely based on a large and representative sample, our findings are not without their limitations. As noted previously, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents strong inference regarding changes over time, whereas the narrow definition of sexual assault allows for only a very conservative estimate of the extent and impact of attempted and completed rape. Although we took care to obtain a large and inclusive sample, lesbians and bisexual women, assaulted graduate women, and women experiencing double victimization were represented in relatively small numbers. Further, although a return rate of approximately 50 to 60% is typically considered acceptable, it may also yield unknown biases, limiting the validity of our findings. In addition, our campus climate measure—although providing important information regarding the academic impact of sexual victimization—is based only on self-reports of subjective perceptions and experiences. We have no reason to doubt these reports, but actual measures of academic performance and progress should be obtained in future research in this area. Interesting questions also remain

concerning possible departmental differences in sexual harassment experiences that might arise from the varying climate for women across academic areas. Finally, data obtained from the SEQ-s and SES-s do not allow for distinctions between incidents on multiple occasions and incidents where several different forms of harassment or assault occur on the same occasion. These and other issues must await future research.

## CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment, attempted rape, and completed rape carry with them a host of adverse psychological and academic consequences, creating barriers to women students' academic development. The widespread nature of victimization documented in this study confirms that women's strong fears for personal safety and perceptions of negative treatment on campus are well-founded. Women enter academia expecting to find challenge, acceptance, and respect; too often, they encounter a climate of indifference, hostility, exploitation, and worse. The past two decades have seen universities nationwide implement policies and procedures to create a safer, more hospitable environment for women students. Nevertheless, it seems clear that these measures fall short of their goals, and additional interventions are still needed to thaw the chilly climate.

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## NOTES

1. The remaining 22 women did not disclose their race or ethnicity.
2. A total of 26 women did not disclose their sexual orientation.
3. Copies of the survey are available from the authors.
4. The behaviors represented by these items were all consistent with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's guidelines regarding sexual harassment (1980); however, the results cannot be equated with legal violations of Title IX. Rather, they should be considered behaviors that meet the psychological definition of sexual harassment, that is, offensive, unwanted behavior that is either sexual in nature, or targets the victim because of her gender.
5. A complete list of GCC scale items and factor loadings is available in Fitzgerald et al. (1996).
6. A complete list of GE scale items is available in Fitzgerald et al. (1996).
7. The small number of graduate women reporting experiences of sexual assault precluded meaningful analyses of cohort differences and academic correlates of sexual assault and double victimization.

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