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Sexual Harassment Under Social Identity Threat: The Computer Harassment Paradigm

Anne Maass, Mara Cadinu, Gaia Guarnieri, and Annalisa Grasselli University of Padova

Two laboratory experiments investigated the hypothesis that threat to male identity would increase the likelihood of gender harassment. In both experiments, using the computer harassment paradigm, male university students (N = 80 in Experiment 1, N = 90 in Experiment 2) were exposed to different types of identity threat (legitimacy threat and threat to group value in Experiment 1 and distinctiveness threat and prototypicality threat in Experiment 2) or to no threat and were then given the opportunity to send pornographic material to a virtual female interaction partner. Results show that (a) participants harassed the female interaction partner more when they were exposed to a legitimacy, distinctiveness, or prototypicality threat than to no threat; (b) this was mainly true for highly identified males; and (c) harassment enhanced postexperimental gender identification. Results are interpreted as supporting a social identity account of gender harassment.

Sexual harassment is a serious problem in practically all countries in which women have entered the job market (see Gruber, Smith, & Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1996; Rubinstein, 1987; Wasti, Bergman, Glomb, & Drasgow, 2000). No work setting seems to be immune to the phenomenon, considering that it has been found in business (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Powell, 1983; Terpstra & Baker, 1987), education (Buschman & Lenart, 1996; Dekker & Barling, 1998; Gervasio & Ruckdeschel, 1992; Maass & Cadinu, 2001; Shepela & Levesque, 1998), and public service and the military (Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981, 1988). Although sexual harassment is counternormative in most countries and illegal in some, cumulative probabilities of becoming a victim of sexual harassment are surprisingly high, resulting in a large proportion of working women experiencing harassment in some form at least once during their lifetime. For some forms of sexual harassment, this risk increases at critical stages during a woman's career, namely at hiring and at promotion (for results of a national survey

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This research was funded by a start-up research grant by the University of Padova on Sexual Harassment at the University. We thank the other members of the research team, Franca Agnoli, Luciano Arcuri, Chiara Levorato, and Massimo Santinello, for their valuable help during the different stages of this project. We are also grateful to Alessandra Rosabianca, Elisabetta Cloch, and Mattia Taroni for their help in the data collection.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Anne Maass, Dipartimento di Psicologia dello Sviluppo e della Socializzazione, Università di Padova, Via Venezia, 8, 35139 Padova, Italy. E-mail: anne.maass@unipd.it conducted in Italy, see Istituto Nazionale di Statistica [ISTAT], 1998). The negative consequences of this phenomenon for both the victim (including physical symptoms, psychological distress, depression, and decreased job satisfaction) and the organization (absenteeism, decreased productivity) are well documented in the literature (Baker, Terpstra, & Larntz, 1990; Morrow, McElroy, & Phillips, 1994; Rubinstein, 1987; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997).

It is not easy to define sexual harassment, but there is agreement on two aspects. First, sexual harassment is generally defined in subjective terms. The different definitions offered by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Sex, 1980) in the United States, by the Rubinstein (1987) report conducted for the European Parliament in 1986, and by most researchers in the field all converge in that they define sexual harassment as verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature that is unwelcome by the victim and that tends to interfere with the recipient's work. Thus, both legal and scientific definitions stress the subjective experience of the victim as a defining feature of sexual harassment.

Second, researchers generally agree that the term *sexual harassment* covers a wide range of phenomena, from relatively benign forms such as telling sexist jokes to public exposure of pornographic material at the workplace to extreme forms of harassment such as sexual blackmail and sexual aggression. Fitzgerald's threefold classification of sexual harassment in sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment is widely accepted (see Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995). Applying this distinction, the least severe but most common form of sexual harassment is gender harassment or misogyny. This category includes verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey insulting, hostile, or degrading attitudes toward

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2003, Vol. 85, No. 5, 853–870 Copyright 2003 by the American Psychological Association, Inc. 0022-3514/03/\$12.00 DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.853 women without aiming at sexual cooperation. Common examples of this form of harassment are the diffusion of pornographic material and sexual epithets, insults, jokes, and gestures made with the intent to offend women (Pryor & Whalen, 1997). It is this form of harassment that is the focus of the present series of studies. In particular, we ask what factors may be driving this widespread phenomenon. If gender harassment is not aiming at sexual cooperation, what is it aiming at? What motivation is driving gender harassment, and what kind of satisfaction might the perpetrator get out of it?

Reinterpreting Sexual Harassment Within a Social Identity Framework

Dall'Ara and Maass (2000) as well as Pryor and colleagues (Pryor, Hesson-McInnis, Hitlan, Olson, & Hahn, 2001; Pryor & Whalen, 1997) have recently made the suggestion to interpret misogyny from a social identity perspective, thereby bridging two bodies of social psychological literature that have developed largely independently in the past: sexual harassment and social identity theory. Social identity theorists (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Brewer, 1979; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) have long argued that one's self-concept derives in part from the status of the groups to which one belongs. People tend to create or maintain a positive self-image by enhancing the status of their own group with respect to relevant comparison groups. According to social identity theory, out-group derogation often derives from the desire to enhance or protect the status of one's own group with respect to a relevant out-group. Not surprisingly, then, out-group members tend to be treated poorly, paid less, believed to possess fewer positive qualities, and perceived as less varied than in-group members (Brewer, 1979; Gaertner, Mann, Murrel, & Dovidio, 1989; Judd & Park, 1988; Linville, Fisher, & Salovey, 1989).

Although social identity theory is concerned with social categorization in general, it can easily be applied to gender identity. There is little doubt that gender constitutes one of the most important, salient, and pervasive social categories. Moreover, male-female relations are dichotomous and mutually exclusive, so that any improvement for one group automatically implies a relative disadvantage for the other. Although males have traditionally enjoyed a higher status in almost any society, it is equally clear that their status advantage is increasingly seen as illegitimate. In particular, the exclusive access of men to many professions, including high-level careers, has been threatened by the entrance of women who at times have better credentials and a higher educational level than the men already employed in the organization.¹ These changes may be perceived as threatening and hence can be expected to produce attempts to defend the status of the dominant group and to reestablish differences in favor of one's own group. If this account is correct, then sexual harassment may simply be one strategy to protect or restore the male's threatened gender identity. In line with this interpretation, survey studies have often shown a particularly high incidence of harassment in professions that were traditionally reserved for men and where the entrance of women may be perceived as particularly threatening (e.g., military or police; see Fitzgerald et al., 1999; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981, 1988).

Compared with other accounts, the social identity interpretation offers a number of unique insights both concerning the antecedents and the mechanisms of gender harassment (for overviews of the relevant literature, see Brown, 2000; Spears, Oakes, Ellemers, & Haslam, 1997; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). First of all, according to the social identity perspective, sexual harassment is seen as an intergroup rather than an interindividual phenomenon. Rather than reflecting the pathological reaction of a single male toward a specific female, harassment is seen as a generalized reaction against females, reflecting dynamic status differences between gender groups. In line with this idea, sexual harassment has been found to occur with greater frequency in settings in which gender becomes a salient basis for categorization. This may occur either because of explicit reference to gender differences (Dall'Ara & Maass, 2000) or token or minority status of women (Levorato & Savani, 2000; Rosenberg, Perlstadt, & Phillips, 1993; Pryor & Whalen, 1997) or more generally because of an unbalanced numerical distribution with males clearly outnumbering females (Gruber, 1998). In all of these cases, gender becomes a highly salient dimension along which coworkers are grouped. It is exactly this shift from an interpersonal to an intergroup construal of a professional setting that is expected to enhance the likelihood of discriminatory intergroup behavior, including harassment.

The second important contribution of the social identity account is its emphasis on social identity threat (see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). The prime prediction derived from social identity theory is that males will be motivated to restore their social identity whenever they are exposed to a group-based self-esteem threat. One way to defend male supremacy and to restore a threatened gender identity is to engage in harassing behaviors against females. In other words, social identity threat is a critical antecedent variable of harassment, and the desire to restore the injured gender identity is the motivational process that is driving harassment. These predictions are the main focus of the present research.

The Role of Social Identity Threat

Although social identity theorists generally agree on the important causal role of threat in in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, social identity threat is not a uniform construct, and operational definitions vary greatly across experiments. Branscombe et al. (1999) have offered a useful taxonomy that distinguishes four basic types of threat. First, people may feel threatened because they are categorized against their will (*category threat*). Because this kind of threat is not relevant to the current research, we do not discuss it further.

More relevant to our argument is the second type of threat, in which the value of the in-group is undermined—for example, by information suggesting that one's own group is valued less, performs less well, or is morally inferior to a relevant out-group (*threat to group value*). There is ample evidence that people tend to react to this kind of threat by derogating the out-group, regard-

¹ In Italy, where the present series of studies was run, the educational level of women tends to be higher than that of men. Women are more likely to graduate from high school, are overrepresented among university students (55% of all students are women), and have a higher likelihood of completing their higher education (see ISTAT, 2003). The Educational Testing Service (Coley, 2001) has reported very similar trends for the United States, where women of all racial groups have been found to be more likely to graduate from college.

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less of whether the threat is generated by the out-group or by third parties (for an overview of the relevant literature, see Branscombe et al., 1999). In the sexual harassment literature, we know of no study in which the value of being male was threatened explicitly, although our social identity interpretation would suggest that this kind of threat may motivate males to engage in harassing conduct toward females.

The third type of threat consists of information that challenges the individual's status as a good or as a prototypical group member (acceptance or prototypicality threat). Members who are highly committed to their group feel especially threatened when they are told that they have a peripheral or marginal status within the group. A particularly relevant example for our context is a recent study by Schmitt and Branscombe (2001) in which men were told that they scored very low on masculinity. This information was perceived as highly threatening by those men who were strongly identified with their gender group. In the sexual harassment literature, we found only one, as yet unpublished, study by Pryor et al. (2001, Experiment 2) investigating the link between prototypicality threat and harassment. In this study, men either learned that they had scored above average (no threat) or that they had scored well below average on a "Male Knowledge Scale" whereas a female participant had scored very well (threat). This feedback clearly placed them in a marginal position on a group-defining dimension (male knowledge). Results showed that male dyads selected more sexist questions to ask the successful women in a subsequent mock job interview after having experienced a threat to their masculinity.

The fourth type of threat identified by Branscombe et al. (1999) refers to information that challenges the distinctiveness of the in-group compared with an out-group (*distinctiveness threat*). Because a meaningful and distinct social identity is important, particularly to people highly identified with their group, any kind of information suggesting that in-group and out-group are indistinguishable or similar will be perceived as threatening. Ironically, people put in this situation at times have such a strong need to achieve distinctiveness that they are willing to accept a negative differentiation of the in-group from the out-group rather than no differentiation at all (Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002). We are not aware of any sexual harassment study in which potential harassers were exposed to distinctiveness threat.

We may add a fifth type of threat to this taxonomy, which we call legitimacy threat and which becomes relevant in situations in which groups are embedded in an unstable status hierarchy. In the case of legitimacy threat, groups are recognized as distinct categories, but the legitimacy of status differences between groups is challenged. In a sense, legitimacy threat may be seen as a special case of threat to group value, but what is being questioned here is not the value of the group per se but the social standing or privileges deriving from a particular group membership. For example, a feminist defending equal rights may well recognize the achievements of males as a category but may still question the legitimacy of the employment privileges deriving from being male. Social identity theory indeed predicts that in hierarchical intergroup settings such as that involving males and females, low-status group members are motivated to improve their disadvantaged position whereas high-status group members are motivated to defend their privileged position when legitimacy concerns arise (Bettencourt & Bartholow, 1998; for an overview, see Brown, 2000). Thus, any claim (e.g., by feminists) that the status advantage of males is illegitimate may be perceived as threatening and may motivate males to defend their privileged status through out-group derogation, including sexual harassment. In the harassment literature, first evidence for this claim comes from Dall'Ara and Maass's (2000) study showing that feminists who challenged the legitimacy of male supremacy were harassed more frequently than traditional women.

Although the above classes of social identity threat are quite distinct and elicit specific motivational states, all, except category threat (which is irrelevant to our research), have been shown to be associated with an increased likelihood of out-group derogation. As evidenced by Branscombe et al.'s (1999) review of the literature, threat to group value motivates group members to enhance the relative value of their group, distinctiveness threat motivates them to establish differences from other groups, and prototype threat motivates them to prove that they are typical and worthy members of their group. We may add that legitimacy threat motivates people to reaffirm the status advantages of their in-group. Although different threats are distinct and may evoke different reactions, there is one strategy that offers an effective common response to all sorts of threat, namely out-group derogation. Outgroup derogation enhances the relative value of the in-group, reinforces its privileged status, increases intergroup differentiation, and also proves the loyalty of the derogating group member. Hence, if our social identity interpretation is correct, sexual harassment, as a specific form of out-group derogation, should be a likely reaction to very different forms of gender identity threat.

However, it is important to recognize that not all group members react to social identity threat in the same manner. Branscombe et al. (1999) as well as Ellemers et al. (2002) have convincingly argued that only those group members who are strongly identified with or committed to their groups will react to social identity threat with out-group derogation.

The Role of Group Identification

People all belong to a great variety of social categories, but only some of these determine self-definition, whereas others are largely irrelevant to self-concept. Threat to an in-group should mainly affect those who are highly identified with that particular group. Although the link between group identification and out-group derogation is not always linear (for overviews, see Brown, 2000; Long & Spears, 1997), there is evidence in the social identity literature suggesting that highly identified group members are more likely to react to perceived in-group threat by derogating the out-group (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Struch & Schwartz, 1989). This is true for different types of threat, including threat to group value, legitimacy threat, and distinctiveness threat (for an overview of the relevant literature, see Branscombe et al., 1999). Extending this reasoning to sexual harassment, one would expect that only males who are highly identified with their gender group should be prone to harass females when exposed to an in-group threatening experience. In line with this argument, Wade and Brittan-Powell (2001) found a greater propensity toward harassment in males strongly identified with their gender, although this study was limited to paper-and-pencil measures. Dall'Ara and Maass (2000) investigated harassing behaviors and found a similar pattern, with harassment being greatest for highly identified males, especially when the woman had expressed feminist views and when the situation was construed as an intergroup setting. Taken together, there is reason to believe that highly identified males will feel more threatened when their gender identity is questioned and, as a consequence, will be more likely to engage in gender harassment.

This brief and selective overview of the relevant literature suggests that social identity theory may offer a fertile ground for explaining gender harassment as an intergroup phenomenon, for investigating conditions that are conducive to harassment, and for understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying this widespread phenomenon. Although there are several isolated findings in the harassment literature that are in line with the social identity explanation proposed above, there is little direct evidence for (a) the link between identity threat and harassment, (b) the self-protective function of harassment, and (c) the interaction between in-group threat and gender identification.

Scope of the Present Research

Two studies were designed to investigate these issues. First of all, we wanted to see whether men engaged in harassing conduct when they were subjected to social identity threat. In Experiment 1, we systematically varied two types of threat, namely threat to group value and legitimacy threat, whereas in Experiment 2, we induced prototypicality and distinctiveness threat together with a no-threat control condition. In line with the social identity literature, we predicted that all four types of threat would increase the likelihood that male participants would harass a female interaction partner.

Second, we tested the moderating role of gender identification predicting that social identity threat would mainly affect highly identified males. In addition, two individual-difference variables were assessed that were thought to be relevant to specific kinds of threat (social dominance orientation [SDO] in the case of legitimacy threat in Experiment 1 and stereotypical self-definition in the case of prototypicality threat in Experiment 2).

Third, we investigated whether harassment is a functional strategy able to protect the person's threatened identity. According to social identity theory and specifically to the self-esteem hypothesis, in-group favoritism and out-group derogation are driven by the desire to maintain, enhance, or restore a positive social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Long & Spears, 1997; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). If sexual harassment serves such an identityprotective function, then the male's identity should be bolstered through harassment just as it has been found to be bolstered through other forms of out-group derogation (Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Oakes & Turner, 1980; for an overview, see Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). In line with this argument, the present experiments attempted to test not only whether harassment is driven by the desire to restore a threatened social identity but also whether harassment is able to achieve this goal successfully. In other words, we ask whether harassment is a functional strategy, able to protect or enhance the perpetrator's identity as male. These issues were investigated within a new experimental paradigm called the computer harassment paradigm.

The Computer Harassment Paradigm

Whereas the majority of previous studies on sexual harassment were field studies, we decided to investigate the above questions in an experimental paradigm that had originally been developed by Dall'Ara and Maass (2000) and that has been refined in the present experiment. The scope of the computer harassment paradigm is to simulate a prototypical form of sexual harassment without actually exposing female participants (or collaborators; see Pryor, 1987; Pryor et al., 2001; Pryor, La Vite, & Stoller, 1993) to sexual harassment, which may be a rather unpleasant experience and, hence, ethically problematic. This problem was resolved by using a virtual victim. The computer harassment paradigm simulates a form of misogyny that has frequently been observed in field studies, namely the display of pornographic material through calendars, pamphlets, or via computer. The exposure of female coworkers to pornographic material has been reported by various American authors as a typical form of harassment (Dekker & Barling, 1998; Pryor & Whalen, 1997; see also Robinson vs. Jacksonville Shipyards, 1991, cited in Pryor & Whalen, 1997). A similar phenomenon is now emerging among chat-line users. Recently, a male university student in Italy was arrested while sending pornographic material to a female chat-line user ("Invia foto porno a ragazzina: Arrestato" ["Sends pornographic photo to girl: arrested"], 2000).

Using a design modeled after this type of harassment, Dall'Ara and Maass (2000) had two men (a naive research participant and a confederate) participate in an alleged experiment on "free associations" via computer. Participants were instructed to exchange images contained in different computer files with two (fictitious) female participants in another laboratory. Importantly, one file, labeled *porno*, contained pornographic material. During the trials, the confederate consistently attempted to persuade the naive participant to send the pornographic material to the women in the other laboratory, using a preestablished series of arguments. The main dependent variables were (a) whether or not the naive participant did indeed follow the confederate's suggestion and (b) if so, how many persuasion attempts were necessary to convince him.

In the present series of studies, the computer harassment paradigm was simplified by either omitting the collaborator entirely from the procedure (Experiment 2) or by substituting for him a virtual coparticipant on an intralaboratory chat line (Experiment 1). Also, we refined the dependent measure; rather than investigating the pure number of pornographic images sent, we assessed the degree to which the images sent to the female interaction partner were offensive.

Compared with previous studies on sexual harassment, the computer harassment paradigm has a series of advantages. Most importantly, contrary to correlational field studies, it allows testing of the causal underpinnings of harassment. Also, compared with previous laboratory paradigms, it is ethically advantageous because it allows study of harassment without exposing female collaborators to harassment. Finally, the new version of the computer paradigm does not require any collaborator and can easily be adapted to study almost any kind of variable that may be of theoretical interest to researchers (including in-group threat, legitimacy and stability of gender differences, numerical gender distribution, role models, normative context, target and perpetrator characteristics, etc.).

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 was designed to investigate three questions. First, we wanted to test the hypothesis that males exposed to a social identity threat would be more likely to harass. This is the single most important prediction derived from our social identity interpretation, but empirical proof has been very limited so far (Dall'Ara & Maass, 2000; Pryor et al., 2001, Experiment 2). In the present experiment, threat was manipulated through two orthogonal manipulations, one posing a threat to group value, the other to the legitimacy of status differences. Threat to group value was manipulated by providing (or not providing) category-based performance feedback, claiming that women generally outperformed men in a task-relevant domain (image recognition). This type of threat is relatively benign because it is specific to a domain that is generally not central to the definition of being male and is of only limited personal relevance. Also, it is provided by the experimenter rather than by the potential victim of harassment.

Legitimacy threat was manipulated by exposing participants to a female interaction partner expressing either traditional or feminist gender role attitudes. In the feminist condition, the woman not only claimed that she intended to get into a high-level career generally reserved for men, but she also disclosed her involvement in a union specifically defending women's rights and equal employment opportunities. In other words, she clearly stated opinions that challenged the legitimacy of the status advantages that men enjoy on the job market. As suggested by Dall'Ara and Maass (2000), feminists are seen as highly threatening because they question the very idea of gender-based status differences and of male superiority in particular. Moreover, the fact that it was the female interaction partner who expressed such attitudes created a direct link between threat and potential victim. In Experiment 1, we assessed the effect of these two types of threat both on the harassing behavior (sending pornographic material to the female interaction partner) and on the self-reported intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment of women in hypothetical hiring situations. This second measure was included to see whether the threatinduced propensity to engage in gender harassment would generalize to more severe forms of harassment such as quid pro quo harassment.

The second aim of the experiment was to investigate the moderating role of two relevant individual-difference variables, namely gender identification and SDO. Not all men should be equally affected by social identity threat. We argue that those highly identified with their gender group should be more susceptible to threat to group value and legitimacy threat (see Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Struch & Schwartz, 1989) and should therefore be more likely to react to such a threat by displaying harassing behaviors (Wade & Brittan-Powell; 2001). An additional individual-difference variable investigated in Experiment 1 was SDO. People with a high SDO tend to hold strong beliefs in the legitimacy of hierarchical group structures together with a desire to dominate other groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Thus, contrary to other forms of dominance, SDO refers to the desire to dominate as a group or as a social category over other groups or categories. If our interpretation of sexual harassment is correct, then men with a strong SDO should feel particularly provoked by feminist views that question the legitimacy of the existing power differential between men and women. We therefore expected these men to engage in strongly harassing behaviors when exposed to legitimacy threat.

The third goal of Experiment 1 was to investigate the identityprotective function of harassment. If harassment is a functional in-group protective strategy, then social identity as males should be bolstered by harassing conduct. In other words, men should feel more positive about their gender identity after having engaged in harassing behaviors compared with men who do not harass.

Hypotheses

First, we hypothesized that sexual harassment (sending pornographic material) would be more frequent in male participants exposed to a social identity threat either in the form of threat to group value or to legitimacy threat. Thus, harassment was hypothesized to be more frequent if (a) the fictitious female interaction partner expressed feminist rather than traditional views (legitimacy threat) and (b) men were described as performing more poorly than women on a relevant task (threat to group value). The same predictions were made for the participants' self-reported intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment in hypothetical hiring situations.

Second, we expected harassment to be more frequent the more participants were self-identified as males and the higher they scored on SDO. More importantly, we expected the individualdifference variables to exert a moderating effect, with harassment being most likely when highly identified and high-SDO men were exposed to threat.

Third, we expected that harassment would have a beneficial effect on participants' gender identification. In other words, men who did harass during the experiment were expected to show a postexperimental increase in gender identification (compared with preexperimental level); negative or no pre–post differences were expected for those participants who did not harass during the experiment.

Method

Experimental Design

The experiment consisted of a 2 (legitimacy threat: feminist vs. traditional female interaction partner) \times 2 (threat to group value vs. no threat) factorial design.

Participants

Eighty young men (ages ranging from 22 to 27 years) volunteered for this study. Of these, the majority (n = 75) were enrolled in different areas of studies at the University of Padova (half in engineering, the remaining half in economy, biology, and psychology), and 5 were working but had graduated only recently.

Procedure

Participants were addressed by a female experimenter and asked to participate in a study on "visual memory." On arrival, participants were led into a small room equipped with a single computer and informed that they were going to interact over an intralaboratory computer chat line (Microsoft NetMeeting) with 2 other "participants" (1 male and 1 female), whom they would meet personally only at the end of the experiment. Before starting the experimental session, participants were asked to complete the Gender Identification Scale (preexperimental assessment) and the Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO scale). Subsequently, they were told that they would exchange images with the other 2 "participants" through the chat line and that they should try to memorize these images as accurately as possible for a subsequent recognition task. In the threat to group value condition, participants were told that women generally do considerably better than men on this kind of task, whereas no mention was made of gender differences in the control condition. The intralaboratory network was explained together with the computer program (ACDSee32) used for receiving and sending the images. The participants' first task was to exchange brief self-descriptions with the other "participants." Each participant received a neutral self-description from the fictitious male partner called "Stefano," which was identical for all experimental conditions. The self-description of the female partner "Marta" varied so that it either indicated rather radical feminist or highly traditional gender attitudes.

At that point, the critical task started. Participants were asked to exchange images during five turns. In addition to exchanging images, participants were allowed to use individual chat lines whenever they wanted. The network was arranged so that each of the men would exchange images with Marta, but all exchanges were supposedly visible to all three participants. On each turn, the real participant was the last one to send images. Marta always sent neutral images; Stefano, who served as a harassing role model, sent a neutral image only on the first turn. At the second turn, he sent a soft-core image (partially nude model) to Marta followed by hardcore images on the subsequent three turns. In parallel, Stefano sent messages to the participant with the clear intent to motivate him to join in ("What do you think?"; "Look what I am sending now!"; "Why don't you send her one from the same file?"). Starting from the third turn (hence, after receiving the first hard-core image), Marta consistently communicated her disagreement through chat-line messages ("What does this have to do with the experiment?"; "This photo is offensive!").

In this scenario, the participant has the possibility to harass Marta on any of the five turns. In particular, he may follow the example of the harassing role model Stefano, knowing well that the victim Marta disapproves of and is offended by the pornographic material. Hence, such behavior would clearly be considered sexual harassment according to the definition provided by the European Parliament (see Rubinstein, 1987) as well as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Sex, 1980; for a similar case, see also *Robinson vs. Jacksonville Shipyards*, 1991, cited in Pryor & Whalen, 1997).

Following the exchange, participants were asked to complete the postexperimental gender identification scale and the Likelihood to Sexually Harass scale (LSH; Pryor, 1987). In addition, participants were asked to rate a list of behaviors for whether they represented sexual harassment or not.

Individual-Difference Variables

The following two individual-difference variables were assessed prior to the experiment.

Gender identification. Two subscales of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale were translated into Italian, and modified so as to refer explicitly to gender (see also Dall'Ara & Maass, 2000). The two subscales of interest, each consisting of four items, were the Private and the Identity subscales (item examples: "In general, I am happy to be male"; "To be a male is an important part of my self-image"). Responses were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale was administered twice in order to assess preand postexperimental gender identification. The internal consistency of the combined subscales was .74 for the pretest and .78 for the posttest.

SDO. To measure SDO, we translated and adapted Pratto et al.'s (1994) SDO scale to the Italian context. After the deletion of culturally inappropriate items (such as "This country must continue to lead the free world" or "It's about time that we put Japan in its place"), a reduced 16-item version was constructed and pretested on a sample of 32 male and female university students. Item examples are "Some groups of people are just more worthy than others"; "Inferior groups should stay in their place." Importantly, no reference was made to gender in any of the items. The response scale ranged from 0 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The scale had an excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$).

Independent Variables

Threat to group value versus no threat. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the threat condition and were told that women had consistently obtained much higher scores on the image recognition task in previous studies. In the no-threat condition, no mention was made of gender differences in task performance.

Legitimacy threat versus no threat. During the preexperimental exchange of personal information, participants were randomly assigned to the traditional versus feminist condition (see Dall'Ara & Maass, 2000). In the former condition, they received a self-description from Marta via computer that was indicative of highly traditional gender-role attitudes:

I am Marta, I am 22 years old, and I am studying education in Padua. Since last year I have been teaching at an Elementary school and I would like to continue working as a school teacher after getting my degree. I think teaching is the ideal job for a woman because it allows you to have sufficient time for family and children. Initially I enrolled at the law school but then I decided to switch to education because I believe that the job of a lawyer is more appropriate for a man. I am not interested in having a prestigious job and I don't feel I could live up to competing with males. In my spare time I enjoy reading.

In the feminist condition, the self-description read as follows:

I am Marta, I am 22 years old, and I am studying economics at Padua. Since last year I have been working in a bank as an accountant and after getting my degree I would like to get into a career at the same bank and become a manager. Usually, people don't consider the job of a manager appropriate for a woman because it takes so much time away from the family, but I feel I could live up to it and I am not afraid to compete with men. This year I have also started to collaborate with a union that defends women's rights and equal employment opportunities. In my spare time, I enjoy listening to music, especially foreign music.

This manipulation had been found to effectively communicate the impression of a highly traditional or a highly egalitarian woman by Dall'Ara and Maass (2000).²

Experimental Material

On each of the five turns, participants were allowed to choose 1 image from a pool of 110 images to be sent to Marta. The images were equally distributed in 10 computer files that were clearly labeled according to topic (for example, nature, animals, etc.). The two files that were of interest to the study were labeled models and porno. In a pretest, 10 male students had been asked to judge 22 images, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely), for how offensive women of their age would find each of the images if sent to them via e-mail. On the basis of these judgments, the images were divided into those of low (M = 1.82) versus high (M = 3.34)offensiveness and assigned either to the model or the porno file. All the images contained in the former file were photographs of partially nude women (with breasts but not genitals exposed). Considering that nude women appear regularly on the title pages of Italian weeklies, it is not surprising that none of these photographs were considered offensive by our male respondents (all ratings below 2.2). In contrast, all photographs assigned to the porno file were clearly pornographic in nature (genitals

² Pilot testing of reduced descriptions containing only information unrelated to Marta's feminist versus traditional gender role attitudes (name, age, area of study, university, and spare time activities) showed that the two protagonists were liked to the same degree (on a scale from 1 to 5, feminist Marta M = 3.25 and traditional Marta M = 3.33). Thus, the somewhat different filler information contained in the two descriptions did not seem to affect participants' reactions to the protagonist.

visible and, in some cases, portraying males and females during intercourse) and rated as such.

Dependent Variables

Sexual harassment. The total number of model images as well as the total number of pornographic images sent by the participant served as dependent measures. Only the latter would be considered indicative of harassment. More importantly, we calculated a weighted harassment score that served as our main dependent variable and that took both the number and the offensiveness of the pornographic images into account. To calculate this latter measure, each image sent by the participant was weighted for its degree of offensiveness on the basis of the pretest scores. For example, if a hypothetical participant sent two images, one moderately offensive (2.5 in pretest) and one highly offensive (4.0 on the pretest), the total weighted harassment score for this participant would be the sum of the two values (6.5).

Intention to harass. As a secondary dependent variable, we also assessed the participant's intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment in hypothetical future situations by adapting four scenarios from Pryor's (1987) LSH scale. This scale identifies men with a high versus a low proclivity to sexually exploit women and is generally used as a predictor of harassing behaviors. In our study, we used this measure unconventionally, as a dependent measure. The LSH scale provides a series of hypothetical scenarios in which the protagonist has the opportunity to take advantage of his status or power to obtain sexual favors from an attractive woman, thus focusing on quid pro quo rather than gender harassment. The participant is asked to rate on a 5-point scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely) the likelihood that he personally would engage in various behaviors indicative of harassment. For the purpose of the present experiment, we selected 4 of the 10 scenarios of the scale. Despite this fact, the internal consistency remained acceptably high ($\alpha = .79$). Also, the response alternatives were modified. In particular, the critical response alternative in which the protagonist explicitly demands "sexual favors" in exchange for professional advantages was reworded, considering that university students tend to refuse such a behavior categorically (see Dall'Ara & Maass, 2000). In the present study, this response alternative was substituted with less explicit ones in which the protagonist offered professional advantages if the woman was "willing to dedicate [her] 'attention" to the protagonist or if she was "willing to prove [her] sex appeal" to the protagonist personally, and so on. All of these expressions are unambiguous but considerably less rude than the explicit reference to sexual favors used in the original scale.

Defining the exposure to pornographic material as sexual harassment. To assess the participants' subjective definition of sending pornographic material as harassment, we added a measure at the very end of the experiment. Subjects were given a list of 12 behaviors (such as "inviting a woman for dinner," "touching a woman's body even if she objects," "sending flowers to a woman," "exploiting one's professional position in order to obtain sexual favors from a woman"). Included in this list was the critical item "showing pornographic photos to a woman." Participants were asked to define each of these behaviors as either a normal fact, a natural fact, sexual violence, sexual harassment, male superiority, male shyness, or male rudeness. This same rating was done twice: The first time, participants were asked to indicate how they personally would define the behavior; the second time, they were asked to indicate how the woman who was the target of the behavior would define it.

Debriefing

After the experiment, participants were carefully debriefed about the true goal of the research. The reasons for not disclosing the true purpose of the experiment from the beginning were explained in detail. Moreover, participants were reassured that the data would be treated in an absolutely anonymous way. Participants also were offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the results once the study was completed.

Results

Harassment

Both the mean number of model images and the mean number of pornographic images that participants sent to the female interaction partner were subjected to a 2 (threat to group value vs. no threat) \times 2 (legitimacy threat vs. no threat) analysis of variance (ANOVA). No effects emerged for the model images that portrayed partially nude women but that had not been rated offensive in the pretest. In contrast, the number of pornographic images varied as a function of feminist threat but not of threat to group value. As predicted by the first hypothesis, participants were more likely to send pornographic images to a feminist woman who challenged the legitimacy of gender-related status differences (M = .83) than to a traditional woman (M = .28), F(1, 76) =11.64, p < .01.

More informative is the weighted harassment score that takes not only the number of pornographic images but also their degree of offensiveness into account. Again, a 2 (threat to group value vs. no threat) \times 2 (legitimacy threat vs. no threat) ANOVA revealed a main effect only for legitimacy threat. In line with the first hypothesis, participants were more likely to harass a feminist woman (M = 3.55) than a traditional woman (M = 1.69), F(1,76) = 11.95, p < .001. There also was a tendency to harass more in the threat-to-group-value (M = 2.86) than in the no-threat (M =2.36) condition, but this effect did not approach significance.

Intention to Harass

The same analysis was repeated using the self-reported intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment as dependent variable. Again, this analysis showed a reliable effect of legitimacy threat on the participants' intention to harass, F(1, 76) = 5.74, p < .05. Men interacting with a feminist woman (M = 3.04) expressed a greater intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment in hypothetical hiring situations than those interacting with a traditional woman (M = 2.61). Taken together, participants interacting with a feminist (rather than traditional) woman (a) sent a greater number of pornographic images, (b) sent images of greater offensiveness, and (c) also expressed a greater intention to harass hypothetical female job applicants if given the possibility.

The Moderating Role of Individual-Difference Variables

In the second hypothesis, we predicted that the two individualdifference variables, gender identification and SDO, would affect sexual harassment by themselves and in interaction with the threat manipulations such that highly identified and high-SDO participants would be most likely to react to threat by harassing the female interaction partner.

Gender identification. We therefore ran a series of regression analyses using either the harassment score or the intention to harass as dependent variables (both standardized) and using preexperimental gender identification as a continuous predictor variable together with the two threat manipulations. In Step 1, the two dummy-coded independent variables (legitimacy threat and threat to group value) were included together with the standardized gender identification score. In Step 2, we added all two-way interactions; the three-way interaction was added in Step 3. In Step 1 (main effects only), gender identification emerged as a reliable predictor of both actual harassment (B = .42, p < .01) and intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment in hypothetical hiring situations (B = .47, p < .001) together with the already known effect of legitimacy threat (B = .71, p < .01 for harassment and B = .51, p < .01 for intention).

Theoretically more interesting are the findings of Step 2 showing, in both analyses, a significant (or almost significant) interaction between gender identification and legitimacy threat whereas no interaction was found with threat to group value, nor was there any reliable three-way interaction in Step 3. Gender identification interacted with legitimacy threat both in the prediction of actual harassment (B = .35, p < .08), and intention to harass (B = .56, p < .005). The regression slopes are shown in Figures 1 and 2. As can be seen, gender identification was a stronger predictor of both actual and intended harassment in the legitimacy threat condition (B = .62, p < .001 for actual harassment and B = .78, p < .001for intention to harass) than in the no-threat condition (B = .23,p < .05 for actual harassment and B = .22, p < .001 for intention to harass). In other words, greatest actual as well as intended harassment was found among highly identified males interacting with a feminist (rather than traditional) interaction partner.

SDO. The same analyses were repeated using the standardized SDO scores as predictor. Again, when we considered only the main effects (Step 1), SDO emerged as a reliable predictor of both harassment (B = .56, p < .001) and intention to harass (B = .69, p < .001) (together with the already known effect of legitimacy threat). More importantly, the interaction between SDO and legitimacy threat (Step 2) predicted actual harassment (B = .31, p <09) as well as intention to harass (B = .58, p < .001). No other effects emerged in Steps 2 or 3. The regression slopes are presented in Figures 3 and 4. Again, SDO was a much weaker predictor in the no-threat condition (B = .32, p < .05 for actual harassment and B = .32, p < .01 for intended harassment) than in the legitimacy threat condition (B = .71, p < .001 for actual harassment and B = .92, p < .001 for intended harassment). Importantly, in the presence of legitimacy threat, SDO remained a strong and reliable predictor of both actual (B = .68, p < .001) and intended (B = .92, p < .001) harassment, even when controlling



Figure 1. Harassment as a function of gender identification in the legitimacy threat versus no-threat condition (Experiment 1).



Figure 2. Intention to harass as a function of gender identification in the legitimacy threat versus no-threat condition (Experiment 1).

for gender identification. Thus, greatest harassment was found among high-SDO males interacting with a feminist woman.

Changes in Gender Identification as a Function of Harassment

Social identity theory assumes that out-group derogation serves identity-protective functions. If harassment is an effective strategy to protect one's gender identity, then participants who harass their female interaction partner during the experiment should show an improvement in gender identification from pre- to posttest compared with those participants who do not harass their female interaction partner (third hypothesis). To test this hypothesis, we divided participants into those who did send at least one pornographic image and those who did not send pornographic material during the experiment and conducted a 2 (harassers vs. nonharassers) \times 2 (pre- vs. postexperimental gender identification) ANOVA with repeated measures on the second variable. A main effect for harassment indicates that men who did send at least one pornographic image (M = 4.51) identified more strongly with their



Figure 3. Harassment as a function of social dominance orientation in the legitimacy threat versus no-threat condition (Experiment 1).



Figure 4. Intention to harass as a function of social dominance orientation in the legitimacy threat versus no-threat condition (Experiment 1).

gender category than those who did not harass (M = 4.17), F(1, 76) = 13.49, p < .005. Also, participants overall showed an increase in gender identification from pre- (M = 4.28) to posttest (M = 4.33), F(1, 78) = 12.41, p < .001. More importantly, the significant interaction between the two variables, F(1, 76) = 5.73, p < .01, confirms the third hypothesis (see Figure 5). Gender identification became stronger in those participants who harassed, t(32) = 4.70, p < .001, but remained stable in those who did not harass.

Perceived Offensiveness

The last dependent variable to be analyzed was the perceived offensiveness of sending pornographic images. This issue was important because participants may have sent more pornographic material to the feminist interaction partner not because they felt threatened by her but because they may have believed that such nontraditional women may be more open-minded and less offended by pornography. We therefore looked at the percentage of participants in the feminist versus traditional condition who defined showing pornographic photographs as sexual harassment and at the percentage who thought that the woman who was the target of the behavior would define it as such. As far as the participants' own perception was concerned, results were quite similar in the two conditions: Only 20% interacting with the traditional woman and 18% interacting with the feminist woman defined such behavior as sexual harassment. Turning to the presumed definition of women, 38% of the participants interacting with a traditional woman thought that the woman would be offended compared with 53% of those interacting with the feminist woman. This clearly rules out the alternative explanation that our participants may have thought that feminist women would be more tolerant toward pornography. In other words, participants interacting with a feminist woman harassed more despite the fact that they were well aware that their interaction partner may interpret their behavior as sexual harassment.

Discussion

Taken together, these findings are largely supportive of our hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that males whose social identity had been threatened would engage in harassing behaviors toward females, presumably as part of an attempt to restore their threatened identity. In line with this argument, our data suggest that threat to the male's identity was indeed a causal factor in harassment, although this was true only for legitimacy threat and not for threat to group value. This difference may not surprise if one considers the differential power of the two manipulations. In the legitimacy threat condition, the feminist interaction partner explicitly challenged the legitimacy of the existing status advantage of males by expressing a competitive attitude and by defending women's rights and equal employment opportunities. By comparison, the performance threat manipulation was relatively benign; in particular, threat was circumscribed to a specific domain (image recognition) that is probably of no personal relevance to participants outside of the experimental setting nor is it stereotypically linked to gender. This may explain why legitimacy threat produced much stronger effects than threat to group value and why legitimacy threat but not threat to group value supported our social identity interpretation of sexual harassment.

Interestingly, participants who interacted with a woman expressing feminist views not only engaged in more harassing behaviors toward this particular woman by exposing her to pornographic material, they also expressed a greater willingness to sexually exploit other women in hypothetical hiring situations in which they imagined having power over female job applicants. Note that the two measures of harassment differed conceptually from each other on various dimensions, the former being a behavioral, the latter a self-reported intention measure; the former referring to a specific target, the latter referring to unknown, hypothetical women; the former assessing gender harassment or misogyny, the latter quid pro quo harassment. Despite these differences, the two measures were highly correlated (r = .72) and were equally sensitive to legitimacy threat. Thus, threat to the male's social identity appears to play a critical role in different forms of harassment.

Besides providing support for our social identity interpretation of harassment, these results also are interesting from a methodological point of view. First, they show that the greater harassment of feminists found in correlational field studies cannot simply be



Figure 5. Pre- and postexperimental gender identification as a function of sending versus not sending pornographic images (Experiment 1).

accounted for by differential reporting rates of feminists compared with traditional women. Feminists are not just oversensitive to the problem or overreacting to a situation that others may define as nonoffensive; rather, our data suggest that they do objectively have a higher likelihood of becoming victims of harassment. Second, this study demonstrates that the modified computer harassment paradigm produces results that are comparable to the original paradigm in which the confederate was physically present (Dall'Ara & Maass, 2000). Thus, a virtual person can easily substitute for the confederate as a harassing role model.

However, why should feminists be the preferred targets of harassment? We have argued that this occurs because they question the legitimacy of the gender-based status differential and hence pose a threat to the male's social identity. In line with this interpretation, our male participants frequently commented on Marta's self-description when she presented herself as feminist (e.g., "I think feminists take a wrong perspective, to be kind"; "Are you suffering from Cinderella complex, look, this is the year 2000") whereas none of them commented on the traditional selfdescription. However, there is a potential alternative explanation according to which participants may have assumed that the less traditional woman was more open-minded in general and hence less scandalized by pornography. There are at least three arguments against this explanation. First of all, if the feminist woman had been perceived as simply more open-minded or modern, then she should also have received a greater number of images of partially nude models that were inoffensive; this was not the case. Second, Marta explicitly and repeatedly communicated through the chat line that she felt offended by the pornographic images. Third, and most important, the participants' perceived offensiveness ratings argue against such an explanation. Approximately half of the participants admitted that a woman would feel sexually harassed if shown pornographic photos, and this percentage was actually higher among those interacting with feminist (vs. traditional) Marta. Thus, there is little reason to believe that participants sent more pornographic pictures to the feminist interaction partner because they thought she could take a joke.

Rather, in line with our explanation, it appears likely that feminists are seen as threatening the privileged status of males. By questioning the legitimacy of gender-related status differentials and by expressing a competitive attitude, feminists seem to trigger the motivation of males to defend their threatened status advantage in an indirect way: through sexual harassment.

A second scope of the experiment was to investigate the moderating role of two individual-difference variables. In line with previous research (see Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Cadinu & Cerchioni, 2001), we had argued that social identity threat would be effective to the extent that individuals actually identify with the social group to which they belong. Thus, we expected participants highly identified as males to be more susceptible to threat to their gender group and, hence, more likely to harass. Our regression analyses provide consistent support for this prediction. Not only is gender identification in itself an excellent predictor of actual and intended harassment, but it interacts with feminist threat in the predicted way, with harassment being most likely and most severe when highly identified males receive a threat to their gender identification. The more participants identify with their gender group, the more they tend to react to a legitimacy threat in a harassing manner.

In a similar vein, we had predicted that men high in SDO would react very strongly to a feminist viewpoint that challenges the hierarchical group structure that is the foundation of their social dominance ideology. Indeed, high-SDO men not only tended to harass more but also showed a specific tendency to react in a highly harassing manner when challenged by a feminist woman. Together, the regression analyses suggest that legitimacy threat has a modest effect on men low in gender identification or in SDO. Only those highly identified with their gender and those with strong beliefs in a hierarchical social structure will defend a threatened identity through sexual harassment.

Importantly, this type of interaction between situational (social identity threat) and individual (gender identification and SDO) difference variables is perfectly in line with Pryor's (1987) Person \times Situation model, according to which sexual harassment is unlikely to occur unless situational and personal predisposition concur. According to Pryor and Whalen (1997), harassing behaviors will only be shown by males who have a proclivity or readiness to harass, but even these males will harass only in situations that are conducive to harassment. In line with this idea, our data suggest that personal characteristics such as gender identification and SDO become highly predictive of harassment under facilitating external conditions—in our case, under social identity threat.

The third goal of Experiment 1 was to test whether sexual harassment actually fulfills an identity-protective function. Again, our findings are in line with predictions showing a postexperimental increase in gender identification in those males who had displayed harassing behaviors during the exchange with the virtual female interaction partner. No such benefit was observed for their politically correct colleagues who had made no use of the pornographic material.

The goal of Experiment 2 was to conceptually replicate and extend the present finding by varying the type of threat to which the potential harasser is exposed. In particular, we were interested in two forms of identity threat that are conceptually different from both threat to group value and legitimacy threat and that were directed at the defining feature of being male: masculinity. In one case, we challenged the participant's prototypicality by telling him that he lacked masculinity. In the other case, a category-based distinctiveness threat was induced by telling participants that men in general were becoming less masculine and more similar to women. Remember that both prototypicality and distinctiveness threat have been found to trigger out-group discrimination, particularly in highly identified group members (for a review of the relevant literature, see Branscombe et al., 1999). If our social identity interpretation of misogyny is correct, then both types of threat should motivate males to also engage in sexually harassing conduct.

Experiment 2

The goal of the second experiment was therefore to compare two types of threat with a no-threat control condition. In the prototypicality threat condition, the participant's personal membership was questioned because he was told that he was a rather atypical male (for a similar manipulation, see Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). His (fictitious) masculinity score placed him closer to females than to males. In contrast, the distinctiveness threat consisted of a category-based threat in which participants were told that male students in general were becoming more feminine. In this case it was the distinctiveness of males compared with females that was questioned. Note that in both conditions, the identity threat was directed at the defining feature of being male: the masculinity of the person or the group. However, in the case of the prototypicality threat, the participant's personal masculinity was questioned, thereby assigning him a peripheral status within his gender group. In contrast, the distinctiveness threat manipulation questioned the standing of the entire category (males) compared with the relevant comparison out-group (females) by claiming that the two groups were becoming indistinguishable.

We predicted that males exposed to either prototypicality or to distinctiveness threat would react by harassing a female interaction partner in an attempt to restore their threatened masculinity. In a sense, sexual harassment is an ideal form of out-group derogation because it offends the out-group while at the same time reaffirming the male's gender identity. However, we expected harassing reactions to be particularly likely for those participants whose personal masculinity was at stake. Although both types of threat are relevant to the male's gender identity, being told that one personally lacks masculinity may be even more threatening to a young man in his early 20s than the knowledge that males in general are becoming less distinct from females.

Also, in line with previous work (Branscombe et al., 1999; Ellemers et al., 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001) and with the findings of Experiment 1, we predicted that highly identified males would be particularly sensitive to prototypicality threat and hence show a greater tendency to engage in harassing behaviors than low identifiers. Recent research by Schmitt and Branscombe (2001) does indeed show that highly identified males feel particularly threatened when they learn that they are nonprototypical males.

We also included Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) in the pretest phase, which served a dual purpose: On the one hand, it allowed us to induce the threat to masculinity; on the other hand, it served as a potential moderator variable. BSRI may be conceptualized as a measure of self-stereotyping, considering that it assesses the degree to which people define themselves in gender-stereotypic terms (Bem, 1981). Hence, men who define themselves as highly prototypical males—that is, high in masculinity and low in femininity—should feel particularly threatened when they learn that their test results place them closer to females than to males. We suspected that males who define themselves in stereotypical ways (and hence perceive themselves as prototypical exemplars of their gender group) would show a marked tendency to harass when their masculinity (and hence their prototypical group status) was questioned.

We also introduced two methodological changes. First, we modified the sexual harassment paradigm by eliminating the virtual collaborator from the design in order to test whether our participants (especially those exposed to threat) would harass the female interaction partner even in the absence of a harassing role model. Second, we eliminated the partially nude models as a separate category from the design. Experiment 1 had shown that situational and individual-difference variables were entirely unrelated to the use of these nonpornographic images. Instead, we decided to use a new set of pornographic images that would show a wider range from relatively soft-core to truly hard-core pornography. Again, the main dependent variable was the weighted harassment score in which each image sent by the participants was weighted according to its degree of offensiveness (from relatively soft-core to hard-core pornography). For all other features, the procedure was similar to that of Experiment 1.

Hypotheses

First, we predicted that harassment would be most likely and most severe when participants were subjected to a prototypicality threat that challenged their personal masculinity and least likely in the no-threat control condition, with distinctiveness threat occupying an intermediate position.

Second, we expected participants with a strong gender identification and with a stereotypical self-definition to harass the female interaction partner more frequently than those low on the respective scales. More importantly, strongly identified participants were expected to show a greater increase in sexual harassment under both prototypicality and distinctiveness threat than low identifiers. Also, participants with a stereotypical self-definition were expected to show a stronger, harassing reaction to prototypicality threat than participants with a less stereotypical self-concept.

Third, males who did harass during the experiment were expected to show a postexperimental increase in gender identification (compared with preexperimental level of identification); this was not expected to occur for those participants who did not harass during the experiment.

Method

Experimental Design

The experiment consisted of three main experimental conditions: prototypicality threat, distinctiveness threat, and no threat, to which participants were randomly assigned.

Participants

Ninety male students enrolled at Padova University volunteered for this experiment (70 from the mechanical engineering, computer engineering, and electrical engineering departments, 20 from the agriculture department).

Procedure

Participants were asked to take part in an experiment in which they would be asked to exchange images with another person via computer. On arrival, preexperimental gender identification was assessed by a female experimenter who was apparently unrelated to the main experiment. Subsequently, the participant was accompanied to the laboratory where the main study took place.

The procedure was similar to the previous study but differed in the following ways. First of all, the only (fictitious) interaction partner was the woman; Stefano, the harassing role model, was deleted from the experimental setup in order to test whether harassment would occur even in the absence of a model. Second, prior to the computer interaction, participants were asked to fill in the BSRI that served to manipulate either prototypicality or distinctiveness threat (see below). Third, the cover story and task were slightly different: Participants were told that the experiment concerned creativity, that they would be exchanging images with a female interaction partner, and that their task was to choose titles for each image (both for those sent and for those received). For each image, participants were asked to choose from a list of four possible titles the one that they considered most creative and original. As in the previous experiment, there were five turns on which participants were exchanging images with their female interaction partner via computer. After the computer session, par-

ticipants completed the postexperimental gender identification scale and were fully debriefed.

Individual-Difference Variables

Gender identification scale. In the present experiment, only a short version (two items) of the Private Identity subscale of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale was used, because this subscale seemed most relevant to the threat manipulation. The same two items were again presented after the computer interaction but this time in a slightly different formulation in order to make the renewed administration appear less strange (e.g., the item "In general I am happy to be a male") was reformulated as "Often I dislike being a male"). Unfortunately, the internal consistency of the scales was rather low ($\alpha = .30$ for the pretest and .50 for the posttest; for the combined pre- and posttest, $\alpha = .76$).

Self-stereotyping (BSRI). The Italian version of the BSRI was used to assess the participants' gender self-concept. Participants were asked to rate the self-descriptiveness of 10 typically male (e.g., independent, dominant) and 10 typically female (e.g., likes children) characteristics on a 5-point scale. The internal consistency was satisfactory for both subscales ($\alpha = .81$ for femininity and .74 for masculinity). The difference between masculine minus feminine items served as an index of how closely the person's self-definition matched traditional gender stereotypes.

Independent Variable: Prototypicality Threat, Distinctiveness Threat Versus No Threat

Besides serving as an individual-difference variable, the BSRI also provided a basis for manipulating the main independent variable: threat to gender identity. After completion of the questionnaire, the experimenter left the room, allegedly to score the questionnaire; on her return, she provided one of three types of feedback. In the no-threat control condition, participants were told that the results were absolutely normal. In the prototypicality threat condition, the experimenter returned with a graph in which the distribution of scores by male and female college students was indicated. The score obtained by the participant fell clearly into the female curve and outside the male curve. The experimenter commented that "we have found a rather strange outcome; as you can see, males usually score in this range, whereas you are here at Level 4, a score that is typical of females." In the distinctiveness threat condition, the experimenter returned with a graph that showed a time series across 11 years in which the female sample had maintained more or less the same average score over time whereas the male sample had moved increasingly closer to the female sample. This was accompanied by the following comment of the experimenter:

We are conducting a university-wide survey. As you can see, years back, this test distinguished very clearly between males and females. But during the last years the results show that male students are becoming increasingly feminine. Look, this is the curve of the males and it is getting closer and closer to that of the females. Practically, the males are becoming less and less macho.

Experimental Material

Following the measurement of the individual-difference variables and the threat manipulation, the computer interaction took place, consisting of five turns on which participants had to exchange images and select appropriate titles for each image. To facilitate the participant's task, the number of images was reduced to 30, equally divided into six files that were clearly labeled (e.g., *landscapes, animals, art, horror, porno, other*). The five images contained in the porno file were selected so as to vary in pornographic content, ranging from mildly pornographic photographs all the way up to an intercourse scene in which both male and female genitals were clearly visible. All images (25 neutral and 10 pornographic images from which 5 were selected for the experiment) had previously been subjected to a pretest. Thirty male and female students had been asked to imagine a situation in which they (for female participants) or a female co-student (for male participants) had received the images from another male student via e-mail. For all images, pretest participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they thought the images (a) were offensive and humiliating to the receiving woman, (b) showed a lack of respect for the receiving woman, and (c) would not evoke any negative reaction from the receiving woman (reverse scoring). Results indicated that the 25 neutral images were consistently rated as completely nonoffensive (M = 0). From the original pool of 10 pornographic images, we selected 5 that varied systematically in degree of offensiveness (Ms = 2.22, 3.22, 3.51, 3.86, and 4.06).

Dependent Variable: Weighted Harassment Score

The most important dependent variable of the present experiment was the weighted harassment score in which each image was multiplied by the degree of pornographic content assigned to that particular image during pretesting.

Debriefing

At the end of the experimental session, participants were carefully debriefed using a two-step procedure. In the first part, the true scope of the research was explained together with the reasons for not disclosing the purpose of the experiment from the beginning; this was accompanied by a renewed reassurance that all data would be treated in an anonymous way. This information was provided both in written and oral form, and participants were encouraged to discuss any additional questions with the experimenter. The second step consisted of a colloquium for those participants who had been exposed to the prototypicality threat. First, the fictitious character of the threatening feedback regarding their personal masculinity score was explained together with the fact that participants had been assigned to conditions in a random fashion. In addition, the hypotheses of the research were carefully explained, and participants were offered the opportunity to receive information about the outcome of the study. During debriefing, particular attention was paid to those participants who had sent pornographic material, some of whom appeared apologetic about their behavior. In these cases, they were reassured by pointing out the benign character of this form of harassment.

Results

Harassment as a Function of Threat

The central question of the second experiment was whether harassment would vary as a function of the threat manipulation. Looking at the number of students who did or did not send at least one pornographic image, we can observe an almost significant difference between conditions, $\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 5.39$, p < .07. Less than one fourth of the participants (23%) sent pornographic material in the no-threat control condition (a value that is lower than expected if one assumes an equal distribution across conditions, p < .01). The percentage increased to 37% in the distinctiveness threat condition and reached 50% in the individual threat condition (exceeding expected value; p < .001).

More interesting is the analysis of the weighted harassment score that takes the defensiveness of the material into account and that was analyzed in a one-way ANOVA with threat conditions (prototypicality threat vs. distinctiveness threat vs. no threat) serving as independent variables. The analysis revealed a significant effect of threat on harassment, F(2, 89) = 3.78, p < .05. Partici-

pants in the prototypicality threat condition (M = 2.05) harassed reliably more than those in the control condition (M = .67), t(58) = 3.03, p < .005. Participants in the distinctiveness threat condition occupied an intermediate position (M = 1.64) that differed marginally from the no-threat control condition, t(58) =1.95, p < .06, but not from the prototypicality threat condition. Taken together, these analyses show that compared with the nothreat control condition, harassment increases under prototypicality threat and, to a lesser degree, under distinctiveness threat.

Individual-Difference Variables

To assess the moderating effect of the two individual-difference variables, we conducted a series of regression analyses in which experimental conditions and the respective individual-difference variables were entered as predictor variables whereas the standardized weighted harassment score served as dependent variable (with all variables being standardized). The two main effects were entered in Step 1, and the interaction between condition and individual-difference variable was added in Step 2.

Gender identification. In Step 1, both gender identification (B = .31, p < .005) and condition (B = .27, p < .01) were reliable predictors of harassment. Theoretically more interesting is the significant interaction in Step 2 (B = .20, p < .05); regression slopes are presented in Figure 6). Whereas gender identification was not predictive of harassment in the control condition (B = .13, ns), it was moderately predictive in the distinctiveness threat condition (B = .35, p = .11) and became definitely significant in the prototypicality threat and, to a lesser extent, distinctiveness threat increased the likelihood of harassment, but mainly in those males who were highly identified with their gender group.

Self-stereotyping (BSRI). The same analyses were repeated for the BSRI. Again, the individual-difference variable was not only significant by itself (B = .20, p < .05), but the interaction with condition was marginally significant (B = .18, p < .09). The three regression slopes represented in Figure 7 make it clear that BSRI is unrelated to harassment in the control (B = .09, ns) as well as in the distinctiveness threat (B = .00, ns) conditions, but it becomes highly predictive of harassment when participants are put



Figure 6. Harassment as a function of gender identification in the three experimental conditions (Experiment 2).



Figure 7. Harassment as a function of self-stereotyping (Bem's Sex Role Inventory) in the three experimental conditions (Experiment 2).

under prototypicality threat (B = .52, p < .05). Self-stereotyping remains a strong and reliable predictor under prototypicality threat (B = .38, p < .05), even when controlling for gender identification. Thus, as predicted, those participants who defined themselves in terms of traditional gender stereotypes were the ones who reacted in the most harassing manner when told that they were highly atypical males, more similar to females than to other males.

Changes in Gender Identification as a Function of Harassment

To investigate changes in gender identification as a function of sending or not sending pornographic material during the experiment, we ran a 2 (did or did not harass) × 2 (pre- vs. postexperimental gender identification) ANOVA with repeated measures on the second variable. Overall, gender identification was stronger in harassers than in nonharassers, F(1, 88) = 25.23, p < .001, and gender identification increased from pre- to posttest, F(1, 88) = 36.61, p < .001. Theoretically more interesting is the predicted interaction between the two factors, F(1, 88) = 12.65, p < .001. As can be seen in Figure 8, gender identification increased reliably from pre- to posttest in harassers, t(32) = 6.46, p < .001, but remained relatively stable in nonharassers, t(56) = 1.99, p < .06.

It is also interesting to note that harassment reliably correlated with postexperimental identity scores, r(90) = .46, p < .001, and that this correlation remained strong and reliable even after partialing out preexperimental identity, r(87) = .39, p < .001. In other words, a strong identification as a male appears to be a risk factor for harassment; in turn, harassment seems to reinforce such an identity, suggesting that harassment feeds back into a self-maintaining cycle.

Discussion

The most important finding of Experiment 2 is the reliable increase in harassment as a function of threat to masculinity. Compared with the no-threat control condition, our male participants were more likely to harass their female interaction partner when their personal masculinity had been questioned, thereby assigning them a peripheral or marginal status within their gender



Figure 8. Pre- and postexperimental gender identification as a function of sending versus not sending pornographic images (Experiment 2).

group (prototypicality threat). A somewhat weaker but still reliable tendency to harass was found in those participants who had been told that males in general were losing masculinity and becoming increasingly similar to females (distinctiveness threat). Threatened males not only were particularly likely to send pornographic material, but they also selected particularly offensive images. In other words, threat not only increased the likelihood of harassment but also the offensiveness of the images selected to harass.

Why should prototypicality threat induce more harassment than distinctiveness threat? We believe that questioning the individual's personal gender identity constitutes a more serious threat and will therefore induce a greater motivation to reestablish a positive identity through harassment than does category-based distinctiveness threat. Prototypicality threat challenges the personal standing within a valued group (males) and is therefore highly diagnostic for the individual, whereas category-based distinctiveness threat allows for exceptions. In the latter case, the participant may believe that male students are generally becoming more feminine but that he personally falls outside the population of "feminine" male students. In other words, it may be less threatening to find out that the category gender is becoming less meaningful than to learn that males are a distinct and meaningful entity but that one personally does not fully belong to this entity. Although less influential than prototypicality threat, distinctiveness threat was nevertheless powerful enough to induce an increase in harassment well beyond the no-threat control condition.

It is important to note that contrary to Experiment 1 and to Pryor et al.'s (2001) research, no information was provided about the female interaction partner in the present experiment. Thus, the female target played no causal role in the threat manipulation of the present paradigm, suggesting that harassment cannot simply be interpreted as a revenge against a person who can be blamed for a personal or group-based offense. This suggests that harassment in this case does serve to restore a damaged self-image as male and that any female target person may serve this purpose, even one who is completely unrelated to the offense. The gender identification data further confirm that this strategy is functional in protecting the male's gender identity. Just like in the previous study, harassers showed a small but reliable increase in postexperimental gender identification, whereas the gender identification of nonharassing males remained unaltered.

Our second experiment also confirms and extends the moderating role of the harasser's personality. Again, individual-difference variables proved to be highly predictive of harassment and to interact with threat in the hypothesized way. The predictive power of preexperimental gender identification varied in a linear fashion across conditions, being highly predictive under prototypicality threat, less predictive and no longer significant under distinctiveness threat, and losing its predictive power entirely in the no-threat control condition.

Also, males who defined themselves as high on masculine and low on feminine traits were particularly susceptible to prototypicality threat that contradicted these self-stereotypes. Previous research has shown that males with a traditionally masculine selfconcept tend to hold attitudes that are more conducive to sexual harassment than less traditional, more feminine males (Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001). Our research extends these findings by showing that these males are also more susceptible to information that challenges their self-definition. Apparently, these males feel highly threatened when their stereotypical self-image as males is questioned and react in a particularly offensive way when interacting with females, presumably in an attempt to reaffirm their gender identity. Note that these same men were not affected by the distinctiveness threat that is much less relevant to their belief that they personally are highly masculine males. This confirms our suspicion that threat is most likely to trigger harassment when it aims at central features of a person's self-definition.

General Discussion

A comparative look at the two studies provides a rather coherent picture of sexual harassment as an attempt to protect or restore a threatened gender identity. The first, and probably most important conclusion that can be drawn from the present series of studies is that men tend to harass women when they feel threatened, and they do so regardless of whether or not they are under the influence of a harassing role model. Note that such threat can take very different shapes and may challenge different facets of social identity, concern different domains, and come from different sources, just as observed by Branscombe et al. (1999) in their review of the social identity literature. With the exception of threat to group value (Experiment 1), all forms of threat (legitimacy, prototypicality, and distinctiveness threat) seemed to encourage harassing behaviors toward a female interaction partner. The consistency of these findings is remarkable considering that the manipulations differed with respect to the source of threat (the potential victim in legitimacy threat vs. a third party in prototypicality and distinctiveness threat), with respect to the threatened domain (status advantage in legitimacy threat vs. masculinity in prototypicality and distinctiveness threat), and with respect to target of threat (individual group member in prototypicality threat vs. category at large in legitimacy and distinctiveness threat).

At the same time, our research suggests that not all types of threat induce harassing responses to the same degree. As manipulated in the present studies, the most powerful forms of threat appeared to be the legitimacy threat in Experiment 1 and the prototypicality threat in Experiment 2. In the former case, it was a feminist woman questioning the legitimacy of the current status differential between males and females. In the latter case it was the (female) experimenter questioning the masculinity of our young, male participants. Although somewhat weaker than prototypicality threat, distinctiveness threat (Experiment 2) produced reliable increases in harassment, whereas threat to group value (Experiment 1) was ineffective in inducing harassment, presumably because the domain (image recognition) that was the target of the manipulation was not a defining or relevant feature of gender. Threat to different and more central group values (such as logical–mathematical capacities, courage, or leadership abilities) may well produce different results.

Thus, we suspect that our manipulations differed in the degree to which they were perceived as threatening to the male's gender identity and that this, in turn, accounts for the observed differences in harassment. To probe the accuracy of this interpretation, we asked a sample of 28 male students (mostly engineering students from the same university) to read a brief description of the four types of threat as manipulated in our studies and to indicate for each the degree to which an average man would feel "threatened as a male" by the information given. In line with our interpretation, on 5-point scales these students indicated that prototypicality threat (M = 2.61) would be the most threatening, followed by distinctiveness (M = 2.41) and legitimacy (M = 2.27) threats, whereas threat to group value, as manipulated here, was considered as significantly less threatening than any other form of threat (M = 1.80). A similar pattern emerged when we asked these same students to what degree "they would personally feel offended or threatened as a male" in the four situations. Again, they reported that they would feel most threatened by the prototypicality threat manipulation (M = 2.36), followed by distinctiveness (M = 2.18) and legitimacy (M = 2.00) threats, whereas they would not be very affected by threat to group value as manipulated in our experiment (M = 1.61). Thus, the four types of threat are indeed perceived as differentially threatening. Those perceived as most threatening are exactly those that produced the greatest amount of harassment, lending support to our interpretation that the degree of harassment is proportional to the severity of identity threat. Obviously, we do not claim that threat to group value will, in principle, be less threatening than prototypicality, legitimacy, or distinctiveness threat, but we are simply referring to the specific manipulations used in the context of our studies.

Although the magnitude of reactions varied in function of the type of threat, our results seem generally in line with the social identity interpretation of sexual harassment from which we started this article. Identity-protective motivational processes seem to be an important force driving gender harassment, a form of harassment that is generally not aiming at sexual cooperation. Obviously, gender harassment or misogyny differ from more severe forms of harassment (unwanted sexual attention and guid pro guo harassment; see Fitzgerald et al., 1995) in many ways, so it remains to be seen whether similar gender identity concerns also play a role in other types of harassment. The intention to engage in quid pro quo harassment, which was assessed in Experiment 1, suggests that even these severe forms of harassment may, at least in part, be driven by the desire to enhance or protect a threatened gender identity. However, additional research investigating actual behavior rather than behavior intention is warranted before definite conclusions can be drawn about other forms of harassment.

The social identity interpretation offered here may also explain why sexual harassment is particularly likely to occur in maledominated work settings (such as mines) and in professions strongly associated with a macho image (police, military). It also explains why career women (ISTAT, 1998) and feminists (Salvadori, 1997) have been found to be preferred objects of harassment. More generally, our findings suggest that it may be useful to interpret misogyny in the frame of social identity and possibly social dominance theory and to link these research areas more explicitly than has been done in the past.

This interpretation, if confirmed by future research, also provides some practical suggestions for the prevention of sexual harassment. If gender harassment (and possibly other forms of harassment) is aimed at preserving and defending a privileged in-group status, then any strategy that reduces the power of categorization along gender lines may be effective. Rather than trying to change the male's attitudes, it may be considerably easier and more efficient to change those contextual aspects of work settings and other environments that are sources of gender categorization and identity threat and that may ultimately be conducive to sexual harassment. The social identity literature offers a wide range of such strategies, including individualization or decategorization, superordinate categorization, cross-categorization, and the creation of interdependence (for a comparative overview of possible strategies, see Brown, 2000), which have rarely been considered as strategies for preventing sexual harassment.

Also, if sexual harassment is primarily a way to restore a threatened gender identity, then one may wonder whether there are alternative, more benign ways to deal with such threat. In other words, are there ways to deflect the occurrence of harassment in response to identity threat? Depending on the type of threat, it may be possible to restore or maintain a positive and distinct gender identity or to reaffirm one's status as a prototypical male without necessarily engaging in sexual degradation of women. For example, if male identity was defined in less stereotypical terms (including less traditional masculine traits and more counterstereotypical traits), then men would feel less threatened when told that they possess nontraditional traits (prototypicality threat) or when exposed to a woman claiming equal rights (legitimacy threat). In other words, the crucial issue may not be how to restore a hurt identity but how to change the perception of the in-group so that what was previously seen as a threat to the male's gender identity is now perceived as compatible with the male self-image. Hence, by changing the definition of the male's gender identity, one may prevent males from feeling threatened while at the same time allowing them to maintain a strong sense of identification with the male in-group, now defined in new, nontraditional terms.

A second general conclusion that can be drawn from the present research is that harassment appears to serve its in-group-protective purpose quite well. In both studies, we included a scale of gender identification both before and after the computer interaction with the (virtual) female participant. Both studies provided support for the predicted identity-enforcing function of harassment. Comparing participants who did versus did not harass during the exchange, we can see that gender identification remained stable in those who did not harass but showed a small but reliable increase in those who harassed. Hence, harassment appears to be an effective way to enhance or protect one's gender identity. It is exactly this identityprotective function that may explain why harassment is such a widespread and persistent phenomenon.

Although our data nicely comply with the social identity interpretation, the exact mechanisms through which harassment bolsters gender identity remain to be identified. Gender harassment may serve multiple needs. Just like other forms of out-group derogation, it denigrates or offends females, thereby creating an intergroup differentiation that is advantageous to the male's ingroup. However, it may also serve as a way to reaffirm the harasser's gender identity in front of other in-group members above and beyond the damage it does to the out-group. It is well known that membership in socially valued groups is not only self-defining but also provides a strong motivation for constructing a public image of the self that is consistent with the group's goals and expectancies (see description of self-categorization theory in Turner et al., 1987). In support of this latter function, there is evidence that males harass more when they act in the presence of other males. In an unpublished study by Maass, Cadinu, and Giusti (2002), dyads were found to harass female interaction partners more than single males, and this tendency was particularly pronounced under threat to group value and in the presence of strong friendship ties. This suggests that sexual harassment may not only serve to defend the privileged status of males by derogating females (reflecting a need for differentiation), but it may also function as an intragroup ingratiation strategy (reflecting a need for assimilation; see optimal distinctiveness hypothesis described in Brewer, 1991). One may even hypothesize that sexual harassment serves different goals depending on the type of threat to which the male is exposed. For example, in-group ingratiation or assimilation may become the dominant motivation under prototypicality threat, whereas intergroup differentiation may be the major concern under distinctiveness threat. Unfortunately, we did not include any process measures in our studies able to identify the exact mechanisms and motives driving threat-induced harassment. We suggest that future studies should include such measures, although the choice of appropriate process variables may not be an easy matter. Most men would be reluctant to admit that they feel threatened by feminist women or by a test challenging their masculinity. As a case in point, male students in our post hoc study reported that they personally would feel much less threatened (M = 2.04) than the "average male" (M = 2.51). The delicate nature of gender identity threat almost certainly demands the use of nonreactive, implicit measures able to avoid distorted or socially desirable responses. We hope that future studies will include such measures. For the time being, the exact mechanisms and multiple functions of harassment remain empirical questions.

The third general conclusion that can be drawn from our data is that not all males react to threat the same way. Both studies provide evidence that some males react very strongly whereas others seem practically immune to any kind of threat. This is nicely in line with Pryor's (1992) Person \times Situation model, according to which harassment requires both a "favorable" situation and a personal predisposition to harass. In our studies, the male's identification with, or commitment to, his gender group emerged as a reliable predictor of harassment under threat. According to social identity theory, only highly identified group members are assumed to feel threatened under these circumstances (see Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001) and hence will engage in out-group derogation, which is exactly what was observed in the present series of experiments.

Although gender identification appears to moderate different forms of social identity threat, there are other variables that seem to become relevant only for specific kinds of threat. For example, we have argued (and found) that SDO becomes predictive in those situations in which the hierarchical group structure is questioned (legitimacy threat in Experiment 1), whereas self-stereotyping becomes particularly relevant when the threat is aimed at the stereotypical self-definition of the group member (prototypicality threat in Experiment 2). Interestingly, participants who scored low on gender identification, SDO, and/or self-stereotyping seemed practically unaffected by threat to their male identity and indeed were unlikely to harass regardless of whether or not their identity was challenged. In contrast, strongly identified men and, for specific kinds of threat, those high in SDO and gender self-stereotyping were particularly sensitive to such threat.³ These results strongly suggest that any kind of harassment prevention program should pay particular attention to these high-risk groups.

Finally, a methodological note about the computer harassment paradigm seems warranted. The present series of studies suggests that the computer harassment paradigm provides a useful tool for studying harassment-related variables in the laboratory without running into the methodological problems typically associated with survey methodology and without running into ethical problems by having confederates suffer the unpleasant consequences of harassment.Thus, our simulation procedure offers a useful alternative paradigm for investigating gender harassment in a controlled but ecologically valid manner.

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³ Although the small sample size of our post hoc study does not allow any definite conclusions, our data suggest that the more males identify with their gender, the more threatening they judged a hypothetical situation of prototypicality (r = .46), distinctiveness (r = .28), and legitimacy threat (r = .21). Along the same lines, the greater the SDO, the more males reported to feel threatened by legitimacy (r = .23) and distinctiveness (r = .34), but not by prototypicality threat (r = .14). The only variable that was not found to be predictive of perceived threat in our post hoc study was self-stereotyping. The reasons for this remain unclear, although it appears plausible that males with a very traditional, masculine self-image may simply be reluctant to admit that they feel threatened.

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