The “customer” is not always right: Third-party sexual harassment in libraries

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Introduction
Third-Party Sexual Harassment at the Library

- Having your hand grabbed and being told you are gorgeous while you are checking items out
- Being leered at, whistled at, and receiving lewd remarks as you are working
- Being told "well he doesn't have to know" when a patron asks you out and is told you are married
- Being told “you look good on your knees” while you are shelving
- Being asked to “come over” by male patron during a phone interaction
- Receiving threats of sexual violence
- Being left a note referring to the appearance of your body
- Being slapped on the buttocks with a magazine by a customer
- Having a patron refuse to leave when the library is closed unless you give them your phone number
- Having a patron run their hand down your back as you are grabbing a book for them
- Being followed to your car after work by a patron who tried to get your number earlier in the day
- Being asked what colour your underwear is
Environmental Scan
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<th>SEARCH STRATEGY AND KEYWORDS</th>
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*majority is professional rather than academic literature
Findings
Retail, Hospitality, and Organizational Studies

- Third-party sexual harassment is pervasive, and has adverse impacts for frontline service workers (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Sczesny & Stalhberg, 2000; Theocharous & Philaretou, 2009)

- “Prime breeding grounds” for third-party sexual harassment (Folgero & Fjeldstad, 1995)
  - “The customer is always right”
  - Low-wage, precarious labour (Good & Cooper, 2016)
  - Sexualized commodification of women’s labour (Wijesinghe, 2017)
  - Hierarchical relationships between customers, employers, employees (Korczynski & Evans, 2013; Poulston, 2008)

- Also highlights employee responses and issues of employer liability (e.g. Eaton, 2004)
Nursing and Healthcare

- Third-party sexual harassment is prevalent in healthcare work, and has adverse impacts on employee well-being and patient care (Babaria et al., 2012; Hibino et al., 2006; Hatch-Maillette & Scalora, 2002)

- **Altruistic, intimate, and confidential nature** of care work makes experiences difficult to label and address (Barbaria et al., 2012; deMayo, 1996; Schneider & Phillips, 1997)
  - Patient vulnerability further complicates this for workers

- Third-party sexual harassment is particularly pervasive with nurses, whose work has traditionally been and continues to be feminized and eroticized (Bronner, Peretz, & Ehrenfeld, 2003; Hibino et al., 2006)
Women’s and Gender Studies

● Important frameworks and concepts:
  ○ Sexual harassment (Baker 2008; MacKinnon 1979)
  ○ Sex-role spillover (Gutek & Morasch, 1982)
  ○ Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989)

● Links socially constructed gender norms and expectations with systemic inequalities of feminized work and emotional labour within frontline work (Forseth, 2005; Kensbock et al., 2015; Virkki, 2008; Williams, 2003)

● Situates third-party sexual harassment within a broader social, historical, political, and economic context and problematizes the matter of power – specifically as it relates to gender (Kensbock et al., 2015; Morganson & Major, 2014)
Almost no empirical research on this topic though there are growing calls for more attention to be paid (e.g. Manley, 1993; Civitello & McLain 2017; Jensen, 2017)

Anecdotal evidence and informal surveys indicate that third-party sexual harassment is pervasive and starkly under-addressed in library workplaces

Library values of inclusion and universal access, as well as customer service expectations, contribute to the reluctance of staff to address this issue with patrons and employers (Jensen, 2017; MacBride 2018)

Feminized nature of library work and “sexy librarian” stereotypes (Emmelhainz, Pappas, & Seale, 2017; Higgins, 2017; Neigel, 2015; Pagowsky & Rigby, 2014)
Social Factors

- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender; patriarchy and rape culture
- Third-party sexual harassment at the library

Work Factors

- Precarious labour
- Feminized labour
- Service work and care work
- Values of universal access

Age, sexual orientation, ability, etc.
Recurring Themes

● Third-party sexual harassment is pervasive, yet under-addressed within organizational and academic discourse.

● Most instances of patron-perpetrated sexual harassment go unreported; employees often feel obligated to react to these occurrences with independent, indirect, informal responses (Good & Cooper, 2016; Hughes & Tadic, 1998).

● Short- and long-term mental health and safety issues are considerable.

● The development and implementation of policies and procedures is critical.

● There is significant need for practical and theoretical training and education in workplaces and pre-professional programs.
Third-Party Sexual Harassment & Intersectionality

- Workers who exist at the intersections of more than one marginalized identity are at increased risk of third-party sexual harassment (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Kensbock et al., 2015)
  - e.g. women of colour, underaged workers, LGBTQ2S workers

- Third-party sexual harassment against women of colour in library work often takes the form of racial microaggressions (Chou & Pho, 2017)

- Extant literature on third-party sexual harassment, across all disciplines, generally lack intersectional analyses

- LIS’ commitment to diversity and inclusion must acknowledge these experiences as we move forward with this issue
Next Steps
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2. Develop LIS education programs, web-based resources, and library-specific training based on identified best practices.

3. Continue to build networks and spaces for conversation amongst LIS students, educators, library workers, and patrons to raise academic and professional discourse and consciousness about this issue, and to destigmatize this form of gender-based violence.

Babaria, Palav, Sakena Abedin, David Berg, and Marcella Nunez-Smith. 2012. “‘I’m Too Used To It’: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study of Third Year Female Medical Students’ Experiences of Gendered Encounters In Medical Education.” Social Science & Medicine 74 (7): 1013-1020.


References


Gleberzon, Brian, Rachel Statz, and Matthew Pym. 2015. “Sexual Harassment of Female Chiropractors By Their Patients: A Pilot Survey Of Faculty At The Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College.” Journal Of The Canadian Chiropractic Association 59 (2), 111–121.

References


References


Thanks!

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