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Harassment of Older Adults in the Workplace

Amy Blackstone

University of Maine, Orono, amy.blackstone@maine.edu

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Corresponding Author	Family Name	Blackstone
	Particle	
	Given Name	Amy
	Suffix	
	Division	Department of Sociology
	Organization	University of Maine
	Address	5728 Fernald Hall, 04469, Orono, Maine
	Email	Amy.blackstone@umit.maine.edu

Abstract	<p>This chapter reviews research on harassment of older adults in the workplace and highlights results from my recent study of harassment of older workers in Maine. I suggest that the power that older people hold at work, at home, and in their communities shapes their workplace harassment experiences. Based on a survey of nearly 200 Maine workers aged 62 and above, four questions framed the study: (1) What is the content of older workers' harassment experiences?; (2) Which older workers are most likely to become targets of workplace harassment?; (3) How do older workers respond to potentially harassing behaviors?; and (4) What do older workers have to say about their workplace experiences? I find that workplace isolation is one of the most common harassment experiences among older workers, that gender differences are less prominent than anticipated, and that many older workers remain silent about their harassment experiences. I conclude by considering what these findings suggest about improving older people's workplace experiences.</p>
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Chapter 3 1
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How do workers come to define certain experiences as workplace harassment and 4
how do they respond to such experiences? How do age, gender, and power across 5
domains such as work, family, and community life shape victimization experiences 6
and mobilization, or actions, in response to harassment? Over time, scholars in 7
diverse specializations such as work, aging, law, gender, and criminology have 8
addressed these and similar questions. In this chapter, I combine these diverse 9
perspectives in order to assess how age, gender, and other dimensions of power 10
shape older workers' harassment experiences. 11

[AU1] **Older Workers in the United States** 12

It is estimated that by the year 2012, approximately 20.8% of men and 12.1% of 13
women aged 65 and over will be participating in the U.S. labor force, up from 16.3% 14
of men and 8.6 % of women in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2006, p. 387). The 15
projected increase in labor force participation among older workers is explained 16
by the aging of the baby boomer generation. Not only are baby boomers getting 17
closer to traditional retirement age, they also appear likely to continue their labor 18
force participation longer than their predecessors did. Although labor force activity 19
declines after age 62 (National Institute on Aging NIA 2007), a recent survey by the 20

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A. Blackstone, Ph.D. (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Maine,
5728 Fernald Hall, Orono, Maine 04469
e-mail: Amy.blackstone@umit.maine.edu

21 American Association of Retired Persons (AARP 2004) found that 8 out of 10 baby
22 boomers expected that they would continue working, at least part time, after they
23 reached the age of initial eligibility for Social Security benefits.

24 As the nation confronts an aging workforce, so too does it face an increasingly
25 broader class of workers for whom the United States Equal Employment Opportunity
26 Commission (EEOC) provides the right to protections (Wakefield and Uggen 2004).
27 In 2004 the EEOC reported having received 17,837 complaints filed under the Age
28 Discrimination in Employment Act (U.S. EEOC 2006). The number of age-based
29 complaints rivaled the number of charges filed under the Americans with Disabilities
30 Act (15,376 in 2004) and was not far behind the more common categories of
31 sex- and race-based complaints (24,249 and 27,696 in 2004, respectively). These
32 statistics matter for any study of power in the workplace because, as two prominent
33 scholars of aging recently put it, “Old people lose authority and autonomy” (Calasanti
34 and Slevin 2006, p. 6).

35 Such estimates and projections have prompted public, political, and scholarly
36 discussion of the unique health and safety issues facing aging workers and their
37 employers (e.g., National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health 2004)
38 and also the potential benefits of an aging workforce (e.g., Nacelewicz 2005; Sterns
39 and Miklos 1995). Much research in the area focuses on employers’ and coworkers’
40 attitudes toward older workers and the impact of an aging workforce on the
41 structure of the workplace (e.g., Brooke and Taylor 2005; Duncan 2003; Marshall
42 2001; Pitt-Catsouphes 2005; Rix 2001; Siegenthaler and Brenner 2000; Sterns et al.
43 1994; Taylor and Walker 1998); access to employment (e.g., Bendick et al. 1999;
44 Hirsch et al. 2000); and workers’ plans for retirement and reasons for later-life labor
45 force participation (Appold 2004; Eichar et al. 1991; Ekerdt et al. 2000; Singh and
46 Verma 2003). Other research studies focus on ageism but not on workplace sexual
47 harassment or bullying per se (Dennis and Thomas 2007; Macnicol 2006; McMullin
48 and Marshall 2001).

49 All these areas of inquiry are important. Yet so too is consideration of workers’
50 own perceptions of their experiences. Although some scholars have studied older
51 workers’ perceptions of workplace discrimination (e.g., Altschuler 2004; Mor-Barak
52 1995; Tougas et al. 2004), these scholars have not considered the broader theoretical
53 implications of their findings. In an AARP study of persons aged 55 and above,
54 some participants wished to work but were not seeking employment because
55 they feared they would be perceived as “too old” by employers, or face other forms
56 of discrimination. The researchers concluded that “age continues to work against
57 many older jobseekers” (Rix 2005, p. 3).

58 A number of questions remain unanswered. How does age impact workers’
59 vulnerability to harassment and discrimination? What are workers’ perceptions of
60 their own vulnerability? And how do these perceptions change for workers as they
61 gain experience in the labor force?

62 Insights from several areas of inquiry framed this study. Much knowledge
63 has been gained about power in the workplace thanks to the efforts of feminist
64 and gender scholars. Scholars of aging provide important additional insight into
65 the experiences and perspectives of older individuals. Knowledge about workplace

violence and victimization comes from scholars in the field of criminology, while 66
 understandings of legal consciousness and mobilization in response to harassment 67
 have been informed by socio-legal studies. Below I describe insights from these 68
 areas of inquiry with particular attention to how each area applies to the present 69
 study of harassment of older workers. In addition to the areas already mentioned, 70
 I also consider insights from life course studies and the sociology of work. 71

Power in the Workplace: Diverse Perspectives 72

Age, gender, social class, and access to social networks and support are among the 73
 most salient determinants of power shaping workplace interactions and experiences 74
 (see, e.g., Acker 1990; Calasanti and Slevin 2001, 2006; Kanter 1977; Rospenda 75
 et al. 1998; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). In the following section I draw from 76
 diverse perspectives to describe the dynamics of power relations and harassment in 77
 the workplace. 78

Within the scholarly community, gender researchers were among the first to draw 79
 attention to issues of power in the workplace. As the feminist movement of the 80
 1960s and 1970s took shape, activists and scholars brought into public view what 81
 many knew privately, but did not discuss: some workplaces were fraught with prob- 82
 lematic sexualized interactions shaped by a hegemonic gender ideology in which 83
 men asserted and maintained sexual and other dominance over women colleagues. 84
 These kinds of workplace interactions were labeled sexual harassment. Catherine 85
 MacKinnon's 1979 book, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, helped push 86
 the issue further into public view and placed it on the political and legal agenda. 87
 Sociocultural work in this area highlighted gender-based power differentials as 88
 the primary predictor of sexual harassment victimization (Welsh 1999). Although 89
 the research findings I present in the following sections of this paper are not limited 90
 to sexual harassment only, the insights of studies confined to sexual harassment 91
 should not be overlooked. This large and diverse body of literature offers general 92
 insight into power dynamics in the workplace, in part because the focus of much 93
 sexual harassment research has broadened over the years. 94

Sexual harassment researchers initially focused on gendered dimensions of 95
 power in the workplace, but the literature has since grown to include inquiry into the 96
 relationships between and among intersecting dimensions of power. For example, 97
 Rospenda et al. (1998) drew attention to the multiple levels at which power plays 98
 out in the workplace, arguing that the effects of gender, race, and class operate 99
 simultaneously, at cultural, organizational, and individual levels to shape individuals' 100
 workplace experiences. Additional research supports the idea that together gender, 101
 race, and class shape workplace harassment experiences (Giuffre and Williams 102
 1994; Texeira 2002) as does sexual identity (DeSouza and Solberg 2004) and 103
 citizenship status (Welsh et al. 2006). Increasingly, sexual harassment researchers 104
 are including consideration of age as an additional dimension of power shaping 105
 workplace experiences. 106

107 The literature on age and work has a long history (e.g., Brooke and Taylor 2005;
108 Marshall et al. 2001; Mortimer 2003) but within the context of workplace harass-
109 ment, age has typically been left out of consideration. Studies of workplace sexual
110 harassment that do analyze the impact of age on experiences or perceptions focus
111 almost exclusively on mid-life or younger workers (Fineran 2002; Ford and Donis
112 1996; Padavic and Orcutt 1997; Uggen and Blackstone 2004) or rely on hypothetical
113 scenarios rather than actual experiences (Wayne 2000). Other studies, focusing
114 more generally on age as a dimension of power, examine its impact within various
115 domains of social life, but not necessarily within the context of paid employment
116 (e.g., Hess 1990; Levy 1988). Broader treatments of the impact of work on older
117 adults have been published (e.g., Schaie and Schooler 1998) but have been criticized
118 for not fully integrating the interaction of age with additional power dimensions
119 such as race, class, and gender (Calasanti 1999).

120 A growing literature considers how age intersects with other power dimensions
121 to influence work experiences and patterns (e.g., Barnett 2005; Calasanti 2002;
122 Calasanti and Slevin 2001, 2006; McMullin and Marshall 2001; Smith and Calasanti
123 2005). Dominant conceptualizations of work itself highlight the connections
124 between age and other dimensions of power. As Calasanti and Slevin (2001) noted,
125 “productivity” should not be equated with paid labor alone, and older volunteers
126 and others who participate in informal economies make this clear. Despite these
127 advances in the conceptualization of age and power, Allen and Walker (2006), in an
128 article on the importance of studying age, claimed that, “Much more integration is
129 needed to connect a gender lens and an aging lens across disciplines...” (p. 155).
130 McMullin (2000) suggested that age relations typically have not been considered in
131 the social inequality literature alongside other dimensions of power such as gender,
132 race, class, and sexual orientation. (See also King 2006). Finally, McMullin and
133 Berger (2006) concluded that “relative to sexism, very little is known about the
134 mechanisms through which ageism is manifested in paid work environments” (p. 219).

135 In addition to considering the literature on gender, it is also important to integrate
136 the aging literature with insights from other disciplines, including criminology and
137 law. Bringing criminological insights together with those from the study of gender,
138 De Coster and her colleagues (1999) were among the first to test how well a general
139 theory of victimization explains sexual harassment, applying routine activities
140 theory to show that workplace victimization can be attributed to the presence of
141 motivated offenders, the proximity of vulnerable targets, and the absence of
142 solidaristic, or cohesive, work groups. Routine activities and other criminological
143 theories focusing on motivated offenders and organizational culture point to the
144 importance of analyzing the relationships between individual-level characteristics
145 and the structural and institutional contexts within which individuals operate (Cohen
146 and Felson 1979; De Coster et al. 1999; Knepfel et al. 2004; Mueller et al. 2001).
147 These theories are therefore useful for examining the role that age plays in shaping
148 workers’ experiences.

149 Researchers in this area also have described the dynamics and features of workplace
150 violence and harassment. Building from their own and others’ work on harassment and
151 generalized workplace abuse (Fendrich et al. 2002; Richman et al. 1999; Rospenda
152 2002; Rospenda, et al. 2000), Rospenda and Richman (2004) developed a typology

of generalized workplace harassment which includes covert hostility, verbal hostility, manipulation, and physical hostility. Others have studied “workplace abuse,” expounding upon bullying and mobbing, two of the more dominant forms of abuse (e.g., Koonin and Green 2004).

In addition to these areas of inquiry, the present study also drew from the socio-legal perspective, which provides insight into individuals’ perceptions of, and responses to, harassment. Theories of legal consciousness point to cultural and social-psychological factors in shaping perceptions of justice and responses to perceived injustices (Bumiller 1988; Ewick and Silbey 1998; Felstiner et al. 1980–81; Kritzer et al. 1991; Merry 1990). According to these theories, cultural schema, as well as social resources, shape individuals’ understandings of law and legality.

Ewick and Silbey (1998) suggested that legal consciousness can take several different forms. One form causes individuals to perceive the law and legality as all-powerful and impenetrable, something over which they have little control. Others might believe that law and legality are a series of meaningless rules and therefore something to be manipulated. Finally, some view the law as a power to be avoided or resisted (see also Ewick and Silbey 2003). The concept of legal consciousness allows for the expression and examination of legality in ways not officially recognized by the law. Although it may be typical to think of the law as being enacted in formal, traditional ways (e.g., through lawsuits), law can also be invoked in informal, less official ways. A growing body of literature addresses various forms of legal consciousness and the contexts within which it is manifested (e.g., Connolly 2002; Fleury-Steiner 2003; Hoffman 2005; Hull 2003; Marshall 2005; Marshall and Barclay 2003; Richman 2001). However, the question of how or whether legal consciousness varies by age has not yet been examined.

Not only can legal consciousness take a variety of forms, but the invocation of the law and legality occurs in different ways (Hoffman 2003). Further, because research on aging populations shows that many are reluctant to acknowledge the impact or existence of ageism in their own lives or to self-identify as “old” (e.g., Fairhurst 2003; Minichiello et al. 2000), it is possible that older workers will *not* choose to identify their experiences either as harassment or as having anything to do with their age. Thus, mobilization in response to harassment, and as shaped by legal consciousness, may work differently for differently positioned workers. For example, workers with more resources to draw from, such as positive coworker, friend, or family relationships, may respond differently to harassment than those with fewer sources of social support. I consider these and other predictions in the form of “objectives questions” below.

Objectives Questions 190

This study is framed by four objectives, each presented in the form of a question. The study rests on the assumption that workers in the United States operate within a culture where particular dimensions of power, such as age and gender, are especially salient; youth is valued over age (Levy 1988); and hetero-normative masculinity is

195 placed hierarchically above all other expressions of gender (Blackstone 2003).
196 In the workplace especially, “old people face repudiation from younger people as
197 being weak, sick, and unable to learn and as nearing death” (King 2006, p. 54).
198 Within this context, workers hold variable amounts of power across several domains
199 including the workplace, family life, and community life. In the present study
200 I addressed the following questions about older workers’ harassment experiences:

- 201 1) What is the content of older workers’ harassment experiences?
- 202 2) Which older workers are most likely to become targets of workplace harassment?
- 203 3) How do older workers respond to potentially harassing behaviors?
- 204 4) What do older workers themselves have to say about their workplace experiences?

205 **Data and Measures**

206 The data come from a sample of workers identified with the assistance of one state-
207 level division of a national program designed to place older workers by providing
208 training and matching older workers with potential employers. This division serves
209 approximately 380 clients each year and tracks and maintains contact information
210 for past clients. Surveys were sent to 576 eligible past and current program partici-
211 pants who had been in the paid workforce at some point since turning age 62.
212 Of these 576 individuals, 183 workers completed the survey, yielding a response
213 rate of 32%. Although a variety of techniques were used to ensure a high response
214 rate,¹ it is possible that one lesson to come from this research is that mailed
215 questionnaires are not the most effective method of data collection for an older
216 population, particularly when participants are asked to share details about workplace
217 experiences that they may fear put them at risk of losing needed employment.

218 The age range of those who returned the survey was 62–87 years old; the mean age
219 of participants was 70 years old and the media age was 68.5 years old. Seventy-six per
220 cent of participants were women and 96% were white. The gender and race composi-
221 tion of participants reflected that of all program participants in the state where data
222 were collected. Thirty-one per cent of participants had graduated from high school,
223 30% had completed some college, and 8% had earned a bachelor’s degree.

¹All potential participants were notified in advance of the survey mailing via an article describing the research and the planned mailing in the program’s monthly newsletter. A \$1 bill was included with each survey in the initial mailing to provide an incentive and an advance token of thanks to participants for returning the surveys. Two months after the initial mailing went out, those who were sent a survey were contacted by phone. Although returned surveys did not contain any identifying information about participants, research assistants contacted individuals to whom a survey had been mailed to remind them that it was not too late to return their survey and to say thanks to those who had already done so. Four months after the initial mailing, everyone on the original mailing list received a letter thanking those who had returned the survey and once again reminding those who had not, that it was not too late to do so. The letter included a return postcard for participants to complete should they wish to receive another copy of the survey. Participants were also provided a telephone number to call and the option of completing the survey by phone.

The primary focus of the survey was a set of workplace harassment questions, based on indicators used in other researchers' studies of generalized harassment (Koonin and Green 2004; Rospenda and Richman 2004) as well as indicators used in my own prior research on workplace harassment (McLaughlin et al. 2008; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Additional questions, including who participants notified about harassment (e.g., no one, friends, family, coworkers, supervisors, attorneys, or government authorities) were placed on the survey, as was demographic and other background information. I also collected data on other aspects of participants' lives such as closeness in their relationships with family and friends. In addition to the quantitative survey questions, two open-ended questions were included on the survey in which participants were asked whether they believed any of their harassment experiences had anything to do with their age or gender (and to explain if so). A final open-ended question asked participants to describe what they had most enjoyed about their work experiences since turning 62.

Results

Objective 1: What Is the Content of Older Workers' Harassment Experiences?

Table 3.1 presents participants' reports of their harassment experiences.

As shown in Table 3.1, the four most common behaviors that participants said they encountered at work were having their work contributions ignored (25.1%); being left out of decisions that affect their work (23.0%); being talked down to by coworkers (20.8%); and being talked down to by bosses (20.2%). All four of these experiences indicated older workers' sense of being devalued in the workplace.

In my prior collaborative research on younger workers (Uggen and Blackstone 2004), my co-investigator and I asked about behaviors similar to those included in the present older worker survey. There were notable differences in the reports of younger and older workers. For example, younger workers most commonly experienced various kinds of offensive joking. Also, experiencing unwanted staring or invasion of personal space was much more common among younger workers. In both the younger and older worker samples, sexual assault and unwanted touching were rare, but both experiences were even less common among older workers. These patterns suggest that even though workers of all ages may be vulnerable to harassment, younger and older workers differ in the types of harassment they experience. The ways that workplace harassment manifests itself may change as workers age.

Additional behaviors that at least 10% of participants reported included verbal exchanges characterized by yelling or swearing; offensive age-related joking about the participant; offensive age-related joking about others; offensive sexual joking about others; being isolated from important work activities; comments or behaviors that demeaned participants' age; and unwanted questions about participants' private lives.

t1.1 **Table 3.1** Percent of older workers who experienced various types of harassing behaviors^a

t1.2	<i>At <u>any</u> job you have held <u>since turning 62</u>, have you experienced...</i>	% Yes
t1.3	...Verbal exchanges characterized by yelling or swearing	13.1 %
t1.4	...Being talked down to by coworkers	20.8
t1.5	... Being talked down to by customers	8.2
t1.6	...Being talked down to by bosses	20.2
t1.7	...Offensive age-related joking about you	9.8
t1.8	...Offensive age-related joking about others	11.5
t1.9	...Offensive sexual joking about you	2.7
t1.10	...Offensive sexual joking about others	10.4
t1.11	...Having your work contributions ignored	25.1
t1.12	...Subtle or obvious threats to your safety	3.3
t1.13	...Bribes to do things that are wrong	1.6
t1.14	...Being hit, pushed or grabbed	2.7
t1.15	...Being isolated from important work activities	12.6
t1.16	...Being left out of decisions that affect your work	23.0
t1.17	...Comments or behaviors that demean your gender	5.5
t1.18	...Comments or behaviors that demean your age	12.6
t1.19	...Unwanted questions about your private life	10.4
t1.20	...Staring or invasion of your personal space	7.7
t1.21	...Unwanted touching	1.6
t1.22	...Sexually explicit pictures, posters, or other materials	1.1
t1.23	...Sexual assault by a coworker or boss	1.1
t1.24	^a Experiences reported by at least 10% of participants are indicated in boldface type	

264 ***Objective 2: Which Older Workers Are Most Likely to Become***
 265 ***Targets of Workplace Harassment?***

266 To understand which older workers were most likely to become targets of workplace
 267 harassment, I conducted *t*-tests of differences in responses to the harassment indi-
 268 cators between the following categories of participants: women and men; those
 269 who had close family relationships and those who did not; and those who had close
 270 friend relationships and those who did not. I compared responses on these measures
 271 for the objective, or behavioral, harassment indicators that at least 10 % of respon-
 272 dents reported experiencing as well as participants' own perceptions of whether
 273 their experiences qualified as harassment. Table 3.2 presents results from *t*-tests of
 274 differences on the objective harassment indicators and on participants' perceptions
 275 of whether experiences qualified as various forms of harassment.

276 Tests for gender differences reveal that there were no statistically significant
 277 differences between men and women in their responses to the objective harassment
 278 indicators. There were also no significant differences between men's and women's
 279 *perceptions* of their experiences.

280 In the survey, participants were asked whether they would define any of their expe-
 281 riences as bullying, hostile, harassment, or sexual harassment. Based on findings in my
 282 prior research on younger workers (Uggen and Blackstone 2004), I hypothesized

that men would be significantly less likely than women to define their experiences as harassment. Cultural realities, as well as stereotypes about gender, prescribe that women are more likely than men to be victimized. Men are also less likely than women to be socialized to think of themselves as potential victims and I therefore hypothesized that they would be less likely to perceive that they had been harassed. The finding in the present study that men and women did *not* differ in the likelihood of perceiving that they had been targets of workplace harassment suggests that the salience of gender as a part of workers' identities may differ based on a worker's age. Indeed, prior research on gender and aging processes generally (e.g., Meadows and Davidson 2006) and older workers specifically (e.g., McMullin and Berger 2006) suggested that older individuals may experience bullying or hostility from coworkers due to their age more than their gender.

The *t*-test results suggest that closeness with family and friends had some impact on harassment experiences but almost no impact on perceptions of workplace harassment experiences. Predictions from routine activities theory suggest that close family and friend relationships may serve a protective function; those with close ties may be perceived by harassers to be less vulnerable targets as they are more likely to have the resources to report and respond to harassment. Conversely, those with close ties might be *more* likely to *perceive* harassment as individuals with whom participants have close relationships can serve as "sounding boards" for participants, enabling them to examine their workplace experiences more critically than they might without others with whom to discuss them.

In terms of behavioral experiences, those who reported having close relationships with family were less likely than those lacking close family relationships to report being talked down to by bosses, less likely to report having their work contributions ignored, and less likely to report being isolated from important work activities. Those who reported having close relationships with friends were less likely than those lacking close friend relationships to report being isolated from important work activities and less likely to report experiencing unwanted questions about their private lives.

While closeness with family had no effect on perceptions of any kind of harassment, closeness with friends was significantly related to perceptions of sexual harassment. As shown in Table 3.2, those who had close friends were more likely than those who did not to *perceive* their experiences as sexual harassment. Of course, one should take into account that the findings reported in Table 3.2 are rather weak given the number of *t*-tests run.

Objective 3: How Do Older Workers Respond to Potentially Harassing Behaviors?

Table 3.3 presents findings from the questions asking older workers to whom they spoke about events they believed to be harassment.

Table 3.2 Percent reporting harassment behaviors and perceptions: independent sample *t*-tests of differences by gender, family relationships, and friend relationships

	Gender		Close w/Family		Close w/Friends	
	% Women	% Men	% Yes	% No	% Yes	% No
t2.1 Behavioral indicators						
t2.2 Verbal exchanges characterized by yelling or swearing	14.5	9.3	11.0	12.9	13.4	10.3
t2.3 Talked down to by coworkers	21.7	18.6	18.5	25.8	23.5	17.2
t2.4 Talked down to by bosses	19.6	23.3	17.8#	32.3	21.0	20.7
t2.5 Offensive age-related joking about you	9.4	11.6	8.2	9.7	10.1	10.3
t2.6 Offensive age-related joking about others	11.6	11.6	11.0	9.7	10.1	13.8
t2.7 Offensive sexual joking about others	9.4	14.0	9.6	12.9	10.9	10.3
t2.8 Work contributions ignored	25.4	23.3	21.2*	41.9	26.1	25.9
t2.9 Isolated from important work activities	11.6	14.0	10.3*	25.8	9.2*	20.7
t2.10 Left out of decisions that affect your work	23.9	18.6	21.9	25.8	21.9	25.8
t2.11 Comments or behaviors that demean your age	13.8	9.3	11.6	12.9	14.3	10.3
t2.12 Unwanted questions about your private life	10.9	9.3	8.9	16.1	7.6#	17.2
t2.13 Perceptions of harassment						
t2.14 Would you consider any of your experiences noted above to be...						
t2.15 ...Bullying?	13.0	14.0	13.7	12.9	16.0	8.6
t2.16 ...Hostile?	23.2	14.0	19.2	19.4	22.7	17.2
t2.17 ...Harassment?	16.7	16.3	15.8	16.1	19.3	12.1
t2.18 ...Sexual harassment?	4.3	9.3	4.8	6.5	7.6#	1.7

#p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01

Sample sizes 138 for women and from 43 for men; 146 for close to family and 31 for not close to family; 119 for close to friends and 58 for not close to friends

Table 3.3 Persons older workers told about experiences of harassment (percentages)^a

	Co-worker	Boss	Family/Friend	Attny/Govt	Other	None
t3.1						
t3.2						
t3.3						
t3.4	45.8	33.3	8.3	0.0	4.2	37.5
t3.5						
t3.6	50.0	26.3	23.7	0.0	5.3	31.6
t3.7	0.0	13.3	13.3	0.0	13.3	60.0
t3.8	16.2	40.5	27.0	0.0	10.8	35.1
t3.9	27.8	11.1	11.1	0.0	5.6	50.0
t3.10	19.0	9.5	9.5	0.0	4.8	66.7
t3.11	40.0	20.0	0.0	0.0 %	0.0 %	60.0
t3.12	26.3	5.3	10.5	0.0	5.3	57.9
t3.13	15.2	34.8	19.1	0.0	4.3	47.8
t3.14	16.7	83.3	0.0	0.0	16.7	16.7
t3.15	0.0	66.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3
t3.16	20.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	20.0
t3.17	8.7	30.4	21.7	0.0	8.7	52.5
t3.18	23.8	35.7	14.3	0.0	2.4	47.6
t3.19	10.0	0.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	60.0
t3.20	21.7	26.1	17.4	0.0	0.0	43.5
t3.21	10.5	26.3	21.1	5.3	10.5	45.0
t3.22	21.4	21.4	28.6	0.0	7.1	35.7
t3.23	0.0	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
t3.24	0.0	0.0	50	0.0	0.0	50
t3.25	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100

^aBecause participants were asked to select as many answers as applied for each behavior reported, rows do not always total to 100 %. Bolded items are those for which at least 10 % of participants said they had the experience. In each row, the cell containing the largest font represents the most common response to each experience

323 Twenty-four participants experienced verbal exchanges characterized by yelling
324 or swearing. Of these, 45.8% told a coworker; 33.3 % told a boss; 8.3 % told a
325 family member or friend; 4.2% told someone other than those specifically asked
326 about on the survey; and 37.5% told no one.

327 Overall, there are several notable patterns in Table 3.3. First, only one participant
328 told an attorney or government agency about any experience. The single instance in
329 which a participant told an attorney or government agency about his/her experience
330 was in response to unwanted questions about his/her private life. Second, participants
331 were likely to confront their harassers directly: the largest “who told” cell in the
332 “talked down to by coworkers” row is coworkers and the largest “who told” cell in
333 the “talked down to by bosses” is bosses. However, many participants told no one
334 about their experiences of harassment.

335 ***Objective 4: What Do Older Workers Themselves Have to Say*** 336 ***About Their Workplace Experiences?***

337 As noted, I included three open-ended questions on the survey, asking participants
338 whether they believed any of their harassment experiences had anything to do with
339 their age or gender (and, if so, to explain) and to describe what they have most
340 enjoyed about their work experiences since turning 62. In addition, many participants
341 wrote unsolicited comments in the margins of the survey. While a small number of
342 participants reported that their gender or age had something to do with their harassment
343 experiences, far more participants wrote in the margins of their surveys, describing
344 reasons for continuing work at their age. Most common reasons cited for working
345 included financial need, maintaining social connections, and remaining mentally,
346 physically, and/or emotionally functional.

347 Participants who added written remarks to the survey more typically wrote about
348 positive, rather than negative, workplace experiences. Those who reported positive
349 experiences said that working helped them maintain their independence; gave them
350 a chance to socialize; provided them an opportunity both to learn and to share their
351 knowledge; kept them busy; and made them feel useful and helpful. For example,
352 one woman wrote, “I take pleasure to be with people. I love working. It keeps your
353 mind alive, your body moving. I have a reason to get up in the morning.” Another
354 said, “My co-workers are fun to work with and I enjoy being able to earn some very
355 much needed and appreciated money. I also appreciate the opportunity to learn new
356 things.” One woman wrote that she most enjoys, “Pride in my work, sense of accom-
357 plishment, making money, having health benefits, a purpose to my day, and being
358 social.” One man reported that he enjoyed “independence and control over my
359 workplace and duties.”

360 Participants who reported negative experiences said that working was sometimes
361 difficult due to disability; that it sometimes felt demeaning to have to work; that
362 their work environment was not enjoyable; and that they experienced ageism at work.
363 For example, one woman wrote, “Because of my age, I was expected to remember

way more than normal. Other people that did that job told me that it was a big guessing game.” Another woman wrote, “Because I was older, the young girls thought I shouldn’t be working, I should be at home waiting to die! They did everything they could to make my life there miserable and since the boss didn’t try to stop it, I had to be quiet.” One woman wrote,

After about age 60–65 I began to notice that people would sometimes ignore me as though I had become invisible. This is also evident in the way that co-workers, supervision, prospective employers and others discount or ignore my ideas, opinions, views and work experience that may be extremely relevant or helpful. One is also patronized or talked down to in many situations where younger people think I have no value. I am not able to find work at the level I had before this age.

Conclusion

In this section, I summarize findings from my study, provide a few caveats, and consider what the findings suggest in terms of how older workers’ experiences might be improved. The most common harassment behaviors included having one’s work contributions ignored; being left out of decisions that affect one’s work; and being talked down to by coworkers and bosses. All of these behaviors share themes of isolation and personal devaluation. The *lack* of difference between men’s and women’s perceptions of their experiences suggests that gender may be a less salient aspect of workplace identity for older workers than it is for younger workers. When sharing their experiences in their own words, as was the case for those participants who chose to write additional comments on their surveys, many reported positive workplace experiences. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, those who did experience harassing behaviors tended not to talk with others about them.

What do these findings suggest about how we might improve workplace experiences for older people? Even though older workers tend not to discuss their harassment experiences with others, coworkers do appear to be a potential source of support. Educating employers about the importance of nurturing positive coworker relationships may be one way to enhance older workers’ experiences. Findings from this study also demonstrated the need to speak with older workers directly—both to hear more about the sorts of experiences they reported in the survey and to hear from them directly about how to improve their experiences. Qualitative research is needed in order to learn more from older workers themselves.

The present findings suggest common patterns among older workers’ experiences. However, the sample from which these findings were drawn was not representative of all older workers. The small sample size, combined with the limited pool from which the sample was drawn (only participants from one state who happened to utilize the services of the worker placement/training program that assisted with data collection), limit the usefulness of this study for understanding the general nature of harassment of older workers. Nevertheless, this study does offer an important first step toward understanding and improving the workplace experience of older people.

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Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
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