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Introduction

The amount of scientific, political, and public attention to sexual harassment has undoubtedly increased in the past 30 years, yet considerable gaps in knowledge about this complex phenomenon exist (e.g., McDonald, 2012; O'Donohue, Downs, & Yeater, 1998; Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009; Quick & McFadyen, 2017). However, it is indisputable that sexual harassment constitutes a serious and prevalent problem worldwide with devastating consequences for people concerned (Burn, 2019; McDonald, 2012). Extensive research on targets of sexual harassment has reported that victims experience not only mental and physical health issues but also serious job-related problems (Chan, Chun, Chow, & Cheung, 2008; Friborg et al., 2017; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999; Sojo, Wood, & Genat, 2016). Reported negative mental and physical health consequences comprise for example psychological distress, reduced psychological well-being, psychosomatic, and depressive or posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (Chan et al., 2008; Friborg et al., 2017; Magley et al., 1999; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Job-related outcomes include lower levels of job satisfaction or performance and work/job withdrawal due to the intimidating, hostile environment created by the perpetrator (Chan et al., 2008; Magley et al., 1999; Willness et al., 2007). Research on sexual harassment that occurs at work has received the greatest interest, although it is linked to negative educational outcomes within the academic context as well (Huerta, Cortina, Pang, Torges, & Magley, 2006). Burn (2019) emphasizes that sexual harassment constitutes a problem behavior which not exclusively takes place at the workplace. It can further arise in various settings such as in public, at home, or, with gaining relevance, on the Internet (see also Barak, 2005).

Since sexual harassment was first explicitly addressed within feminist discourse influenced by Catharine MacKinnon (1979) in the United States (US), the term subsequently gained attention in the European Union (EU) in the mid-1980s (Burn, 2019; Latcheva,

2017; MacKinnon, 1979; Pina et al., 2009; Shively, 1995). Dealing with sexual harassment became more and more important in EU policies because research has revealed that this problem behavior was common throughout EU member states (Gomes, Owens, & Morgan, 2004). Accordingly, recent research has focused on women being sexually harassed by men looking at victim reports (e.g., Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; McDonald, 2012; Pina et al., 2009; Sojo et al., 2016). However, to fully understand what constitutes sexual harassment, the characteristics of females and males who engage in sexual harassment need to be examined in order to take the right measures considering an appropriate approach towards victims and perpetrators to further develop fruitful prevention strategies. Yet, less research has focused on potential characteristics of sexual harassers, and almost no research addressed female-to-male or same-sex sexual harassment (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Berdahl, 2007; Russel & Oswald, 2016).

Scientific research has recently begun to recognize the relevance for understanding individual characteristics of sexual harassment perpetrators (Pina et al., 2009). As previous research suggests a link between sexual harassment and more severe coercive sexual behaviors such as rape (Pryor, 1987; Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006), Pina et al. (2009) argue that “the same social-cognitive explanations of rape may be used to understand sexual harassment” (p. 133). Within sexual aggression literature, some work has been done to identify personal characteristics of rapists and sexual harassers, with the result that both seem to show a lack of empathy (e.g., Barnett & Mann, 2013; Bongiorno, Langbroek, Bain, Ting, & Ryan, 2019; Ward et al., 2006). Since empathetic responses are essential to the proper functioning of social interactions, disruptive behavior such as sexual harassment or rape might be a serious consequence of empathy deficits (Barnett & Mann, 2013). Current research further suggests that “deficits in empathy involve either an inability or a deficiency in the ability to differentiate another’s perspective from one’s own” (Keenan &

Ward, 2000, p. 50). Hence, perpetrators of sexual harassment and other forms of sexually aggressive behaviors are thought to have a distorted thinking, which is characterized by a difficulty in perspective taking (Pryor, 1987). Accordingly, Dekker and Barling (1998) state that poor perspective taking is related to a greater likelihood of sexual harassment behavior. Moreover, a growing body of research in rape literature indicates that such deficiencies in perspective taking are associated with a lack in the offender's Theory of Mind (ToM) (e.g., Barnett & Mann, 2013; Castellino, Bosco, Marshall, Marshall, & Veglia, 2011; Keenan & Ward, 2000; Polaschek & Ward, 2002; Ward, Keenan, & Hudson, 2000).

While there has been a strong focus on empathy and perspective taking in the research of sexual offending (e.g., Barnett & Mann, 2013), less attention has been given to the construct of perspective taking in sexual harassment studies (Diehl, Glaser, & Bohner, 2014; Zimmerman & Myers, 2013), which leaves a very important gap in the current knowledge of sexual harassment. Therefore, this study aims to provide a deeper insight into the underlying processes of individual dispositions that drive sexual harassment behavior with respect to empathy and ToM processes. Instead of focusing on victims of sexually aggressive behaviors and men as potential perpetrators, like the majority of past research did (e.g., Berdahl, 2007; Gruber, 1998; Gutek, Murphy, & Douma, 2004; Holland & Cortina, 2013; Sojo et al., 2016), the tendency to engage in sexual harassment of women and men in the general population will be assessed. Hence, the present thesis will allow for a better understanding whether the propensity to sexually harass is related to a deficiency in empathy and/or ToM. Before moving forward in the exploration of this proposed relationship, important terms will be defined hereinafter.

Definitions of sexual harassment

Psychological definitions. Defining what constitutes sexual harassment has turned out to pose major difficulties within (but not only) psychological research and a universally

shared definition of sexual harassment does yet not exist (Latcheva, 2017; Pina et al., 2009; Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). Although the term sexual harassment is widespread, academics have often disagreed upon which type of behavior is considered as sexually harassing (Pina et al., 2009; Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). For example, it has been under discussion if nonverbal behaviors such as staring or whistling constitute sexual harassment. Additionally, it has been questioned if verbal remarks as sexual jokes and sexual comments about one's figure or sex life can be considered as such (Pina et al., 2009). The main argument in this debate is that flirting and sexual banter at the workplace can be pleasant and are not inconclusively done with malicious intent (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 1999). As a result, targets of sexual harassment often face difficulty in identifying what sexual harassment is and what is not, which results in an under-reporting of incidents (Latcheva, 2017). Thus, sexual harassment is still made invisible, which has already been noted by MacKinnon (1979), who pointed out that "lacking a term to express it, sexual harassment was literally unspeakable, which made a generalized, shared, and social definition of it inaccessible" (p. 27).

This is aggravated by the fact that the debate on what constitutes sexual harassment within academic literature yields further definitional issues (O'Donohue et al., 1998; Pina et al., 2009). To name a few, there is still a vast disagreement on whether sexual harassment requires to happen in a context of unequal power and/or at a certain place (e.g., workplace). In fact, psychology researches have had their focus on sexual harassment that occurs at the workplace from the very beginning (Burn, 2019). But sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon with devastating consequences for targets that can take place in every social context (e.g., public transportation, social media, or educational settings). It has also been discussed if sexist behavior represents a type of sexual harassment called gender harassment, which comprises degrading gender-related attitudes and behaviors

(e.g., obscene sexual gestures or heterosexist/sexist jokes) (Burn, 2019; O'Donohue et al., 1998). This leads to the tripartite model of sexual harassment by Fitzgerald, Swan, and Magley (1997; cited as Burn, 2019, p. 97), which defines gender harassment together with unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion as behavioral types of sexual harassment. Unwanted sexual attention includes, for instance, comments about another person's body, unwanted sexual touching, and repeated sexual advances that are unreciprocated. However, to demand sexual favors of somebody in exchange for rewards or benefits (e.g., promotion or better grades) is considered as sexual coercion. Further, it is reported that gender harassment is the most common form of sexual harassment in comparison to unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion, yet it is argued to be less severe and intense than the other two forms (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Sojo et al., 2016; Quick & McFadyen, 2017). Based on the broad range of conceptual difficulties and in line with the tripartite model of sexual harassment, it seems vital to use a broader definition of sexual harassment in the (socio-)psychological context to embrace each target's subjective perception. Consistent with this, Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fischer (1995b) view sexual harassment "as unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding her resources, or threatening her well-being" (p. 128). To put the emphasis on *unwanted*, a similar but more simplistic definition has already been stated by MacKinnon (1979) in the late 1970s, who interpreted sexual harassment as "the unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in the context of a relationship of unequal power" (p. 1). And despite the body of work in this field has increased over the past 30 years, recent definitions still include the same main elements and indicate sexual harassment "as unwanted or unwelcome, and which has the purpose or effect of being intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive" (McDonald, 2012, p. 2).

To conclude, psychological definitions of sexual harassment vary in their research emphasis and breadth. Consequently, further research is needed to achieve a satisfying and generalized definition considering the conceptual difficulties mentioned. In addition, it should be noted the current research focus is primarily on sexual harassment that occurs in working environments and affects almost exclusively women (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1995b; Holland & Cortina, 2013; McDonald, 2012; Sojo et al., 2016). Hence, it is suggested to examine this phenomenon within a broader scope, as it occurs in various other settings and also males are affected (e.g., Burn, 2019; Latcheva, 2017; Ménard, Hall, Phung, Ghebrial, & Martin, 2003).

Legal definitions. In contrast to psychological definitions, sexual harassment as a legal concept is based on legal statutes, case law, appellate decisions, and evolves in accordance with regulatory definitions (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995a). Consequently, legal definitions call for a more specific formulation based on the psychological construct. However, current research appears to acknowledge that definitions of sexual harassment need to include physical, verbal, and nonverbal behaviors, according to the findings of a statistical survey on sexual harassment in the EU conducted by the European Commission (1998). Moreover, it was observed that the European Commission's Code of Practice, which provides a definition for sexual harassment, is widely used among researchers: "Sexual harassment means unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of women and men at work. This includes unwelcome physical, verbal or nonverbal conduct" (European Commission, 1998, p. 12). If sexual harassment is not explicitly defined and regulated by law, Codes of Practice are used for guidance by courts and are legally binding in some EU Member States, including Austria (Department of Justice and Equality, 2004).

Since 2002, EU Member States have to specifically interdict sexual harassment on grounds of the European Equal Treatment Directive 2002/73/EC (Pina et al., 2009). In 2006, Directive 2002/73/EC was revised so that at present the EU-wide prohibition of sexual harassment is established in Directive 2006/54/EC for the private sector, as well in Directive 2004/113/EC for the public sector (Latcheva, 2017). Both EU regulations are implemented in Austrian civil law under the Equal Treatment Act and the Federal Equal Treatment Act (European Commission, 2016), and constitute “sexual harassment as discrimination based on the grounds of sex” (Latcheva, 2017, p. 1823), which is in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU to achieve equal treatment between women and men. In detail, sexual harassment is defined as any sex-related behavior with intent to violate the dignity of a person by intruding her/his sexual sphere (Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes, 2004). This type of behavior is characterized as unwanted, inappropriate or offensive for the target and results in an intimidating, hostile work environment for the person affected. Additionally, treating a person differently due to the rejection or acceptance of sex-related behaviors is referred to as sexual harassment. At this point, it should be noted that the EU law, similar to psychological research, has its focus on workplace sexual harassment, though it is acknowledged that it can occur outside the work environment (Latcheva, 2017).

Considering criminal law, sexual harassment is prohibited by § 218 of the Austrian Criminal Code, which was amended in 2017 (Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes, 2017). The revised version was extended by a broader definition of sexual harassment, and now includes an additional type of behavior that constitutes a violation of a person’s dignity: unwanted and intensive touching of body parts that are related to the victim’s sexual sphere. Previously, only sexual acts committed against a target’s will were treated as a

criminal offense. Yet, verbal and nonverbal sex-related behaviors are not established as sexual harassment by criminal law.

Measuring sexual harassment

Though efforts have been made in conceptualizing sexual harassment, the lack of a universally shared definition aggravates the objective measurement of this phenomenon (European Commission, 1998). Apparently, dissimilarities in perceptions of which specific types of behavior constitute sexual harassment pose the biggest issue. Most important, the given conceptual differences influence the quality as well as meaningfulness of psychological research methods (Pina et al., 2009), and have an effect on the proper interpretation of findings (European Commission, 1998). Accordingly, various measurements have been developed in order to assess different aspects of sexual harassment (Pina et al., 2009). To measure victim-based experiences, the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald et al., 1995a) constitutes a widely used instrument that is consistent with the previously discussed tripartite model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; cited as Burn, 2019, p. 97). Pina et al. (2009) further mention the Inventory of Sexual Harassment by Gruber (1992), or the Sexual Harassment Questionnaire by Barling, Dekker, Loughlin, Fullagar, Kelloway, and Johnson (1996) for the evaluation of the target's perspective and categorization of specific dimensions of sexual harassment.

Despite victim-based definitions of sexual harassment are of vital importance to correctly capture every facet of sexually harassing behaviors, this thesis has its main interest in characteristics of individuals with a tendency to commit sexual harassment. To address this issue, it is assumed that sexual harassment can be divided into two main general forms: hostile environment harassment and quid pro quo harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995a). Both forms capture as well specific dimensions of the tripartite model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; cited as Burn, 2019, p. 97). Instruments with the

purpose to assess those two types will be introduced in short here, a more detailed description is provided in the method section.

Hostile environment harassment. Gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention are accountable for an adverse work environment (Quick & McFadyen, 2017). Both types constitute sexual acts or sexist behaviors that create an intimidating (work) environment for the target (Key & Ridge, 2011). It has to be noted that those behaviors can be evident (e.g., repeated requests for dates) as well as subtle (e.g., suggestive comments) in their occurrence. The proclivity of a person to conduct hostile environment harassment can be measured by Bartling and Eisenman's (1993) Sexual Harassment Proclivities (SHP) scale. It is assumed that individuals with a high level of sexual harassment proclivity engage more easily in hostile environment harassment.

Quid pro quo harassment. Sexual coercion can be defined as quid pro quo sexual harassment (Quick & McFadyen, 2017). In contrast to hostile environment harassment and the proclivity to sexually harass others, quid pro quo harassment is a more extreme form as it constitutes sexual exploitation (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993). The Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) scale by Pryor (1987) was developed to assess the likelihood of a person to sexually exploit a subordinate by providing rewards or benefits (e.g., promotion) in exchange for sexual favors.

Gender differences in the propensity to sexually harass

In a meta-analytic review of 74 studies on sexual harassment in eleven member states of Northern and Western Europe, Timmerman and Bajema (1999) concluded that 30%-50% of females and 10% of males reported having experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives. Above, a survey conducted in 2014 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) revealed, that sexual harassment still constitutes a frequent experience for women throughout the 28 EU member states (Latcheva, 2017).

Results indicate, that approximately 83 to 102 million women (45% -55%) in the EU have been target of sexual harassment behavior. Universally, research on sexual harassment shows that perpetrators are predominantly men (Espelage, Hong, Rinehart, & Doshi, 2016; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; McDonald, 2012), and the majority of victims are women (European Commission, 1998). Though sexual harassment of females is the most common form, it is suggested that sexual harassment of men by women occurs with increased frequency (Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996; McDonald, 2012). It has to be noted that males who experience sexual harassment are less likely to report the incidence. Additionally, it was found that men who reported being a victim of sexual harassment were believed less and in return punished more than females who complained about sexual harassment (Madera, Podsatz, King, & Hebl, 2007).

Moreover, gender differences regarding the perception of what type of behavior constitutes sexual harassment have been found (Ekore, 2012; Isbell, Swedish, & Gazan, 2005). Women seem to have a more comprehensive concept of unacceptable social sexual behavior (e.g., sexual teasing or jokes). In addition, female targets of sexual harassment are more likely to report certain types of harassment. However, the proportion of men who also agree upon the interpretation of unwanted sexual jokes as sexually harassing is raising (Pina et al., 2009). This is particularly important because verbal comments and especially sexual jokes are the most frequent form of experienced sexual harassment (European Commission, 1998).

Despite the fact that females and males can engage in sexual harassment, findings reveal that men demonstrate a higher propensity to harass (Ménard et al., 2003; Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). For instance, results from a previous study by Ménard et al. (2003) have shown that “[m]en were twice as likely to be sexually harassing and 3 times more likely to be sexually coercive as women” (p. 1222). Correspondingly, when measuring the

propensity to perform sexually harassing behaviors, recent research reports significantly higher scores for men than for women on sexual harassment scales (e.g., Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Isbell et al., 2005; Zeigler-Hill, Besser, Morag, & Campbell, 2016). In addition, men demonstrated a higher propensity to sexually harass individuals of the opposite sex than women. Because past research predominantly focused on exploring male sexual harassment, little has been done to investigate why women engage in this specific type of sexual violence (Luthar, 1995; Ménard et al., 2003). Thus, the purpose of this study is to shed light on contributing factors to female and male sexual harassment.

Underlying processes of sexual harassment

It is fundamental to understand the underpinning processes that drive sexually harassing behaviors in order to establish not only successful therapeutic intervention but also prevention strategies. Based on findings from psychological research in the field of sexual offending, deficits in empathy and/or ToM abilities are suggested to be associated with a higher propensity to engage in sexual violence (e.g., Barnett & Mann, 2013; Diehl et al., 2014; Zimmerman & Myers, 2013). Sexual harassment, as a form of sexual violence (Ybarra & Thompson, 2018), has been linked to poor empathy and/or ToM skills as well (e.g., Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987). Thus, the present study sought to investigate the underlying processes that may contribute to the emergence of sexual harassment behavior. For this purpose, the concepts of empathy and ToM will be discussed. Before doing so, it has to be noted that these terms are frequently used as synonyms (Singer, 2006). However, based on evidence from social neuroscience research, the current study relies on the notion that a distinction between cognitive and affective routes in terms of perspective taking can be made (e.g., De Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Kanske, Böckler, Trautwein, & Singer, 2015). In accordance with that, the terms ToM, mentalizing, and cognitive perspective taking can be used interchangeably and refer to the representation of mental states,

beliefs, and intentions of other individuals. In contrast, the ability to share others' feelings is linked to the construct of empathy. In the following, the distinctive features of empathizing and mentalizing abilities will be discussed in detail.

Defining empathy

Empathy is generally understood as the ability to share other people's emotional state, which constitutes a key factor for successful social interactions (Singer, 2006). Since no unified definition of empathy exists, the main aspects of this complex psychological phenomenon will be addressed. Singer and Lamm (2009) explain that "empathy occurs when an observer perceives or imagines someone else's (i.e., the target's) affect and this triggers a response such that the observer partially feels what the target is feeling" (p. 82). Taken together, empathizing enables individuals to understand and feel others' emotions. Thus, when talking about empathy, a distinction between emotional and cognitive empathy can be made (Singer, 2006).

Emotional or affective empathy can be described as an automatic and fast process, that pictures an emotional response to another person's affective state (Yu & Chou, 2018). This response comprises the same emotion that someone else is feeling, yet, the shared affect remains distinguishable from feelings that originate in oneself (Singer, 2006). Within the affective approach, further emotional responses have been identified that are closely related to empathy: mimicry, emotional contagion, sympathy, empathic concern, and compassion (Singer & Lamm, 2009). Mimicry and emotional contagion often occur before an empathic reaction takes place and contribute to it. Mimicry can be described as an automatic synchronization to or imitation of cues from others (e.g., affective expressions or postures), whereas emotional contagion can arise from mimics on multiple levels (Prochazkova & Kret, 2017). Important is, that mimicking an affective facial expression of someone else does not necessarily evoke the same emotion in the self because of weak

activation in the affective domain of motor muscles. In contrast, emotional contagion elicits its affective responses by means of adopting them, and therefore constitutes a higher emotional construct than mimicry. A key factor in differentiating mimicry and emotional contagion from empathy is that an empathetic response requires the identification of the source of an affective reaction (Singer & Lamm, 2009). While mimicry and emotional contagion precede empathy, the responses sympathy, empathetic concern, and compassion succeed. They all represent a specific reaction to the affective state of other individuals but do not necessarily involve affective sharing. For instance, feeling compassion for somebody who is sad does not elicit feelings of sadness in the self, but rather the urge to care for the individual. Hence, for sympathy, empathetic concern, and compassion applies that the observer's emotions are oriented to the person concerned.

With cognitive empathy, the focus is on the ability to infer emotional states of others by taking their perspective (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004), and with taking another person's perspective, the understanding of the cause of her/his feelings becomes feasible (De Waal, 2008). Thus, cognitive empathy implies the understanding of an individual's emotional experience in the sense of what a person is feeling and why. To realize this, cognitive empathy depends upon more complex cognitive functions than emotional empathy (e.g., De Waal, 2008; Decety & Jackson, 2004; Shamay-Tsoory, Aharon-Peretz, & Perry, 2009; Singer, 2006; Yu & Chou, 2018). Those higher levels of processing are suggested to be responsible for the attribution of other individual's mental states and are referred to as ToM or mentalizing processes. Hence, cognitive empathy and ToM are suggested to be closely related as both constructs draw on perspective taking mechanisms. To elucidate their difference, it is argued that cognitive empathy is responsible for the understanding of emotions as opposed to cognitions (Reniers, Corcoran, Drake, Shryane, & Völlm, 2011).

Furthermore, gender differences in empathy have been broadly discussed among scientific researchers (e.g., Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Davis, 1983; Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000), yet, mixed results regarding this issue have been reported (Michalska, Kinzler, & Decety, 2013). On the one hand, studies using self-report measurements such as the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) by Davis (1983) demonstrate robust evidence for gender-related differences with women scoring higher on empathy scales than men (e.g., Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). On the other hand, more recent studies using neurophysiological measures reveal inconsistent findings regarding gender-related differences (Michalska et al., 2013). For instance, evidence from research designs using facial electromyography (EMG) indicates that females show greater facial mimicry when being exposed to facial expressions (e.g., happy or angry faces) compared to males (Lundqvist, 1995). Nevertheless, a meta-analysis of neuroimaging studies on empathy for pain revealed no evidence for gender differences in empathetic brain responses (Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011). Based on those findings it has been suggested that gender-related differences in empathy occur under specific conditions (e.g., variation of target: friend or enemy) and depend on the context and measurement (explicit or implicit methods) used (e.g., Michalska et al., 2013; Rueckert, Branch, & Doan, 2011; Singer, Seymour, O'Doherty, Stephan, Dolan, & Frith, 2006). Hence, self-report empathy-measures may reflect one's identification with gender stereotypes concerning the expression of emotions, which is particularly attributed to women (Michalska et al., 2013). As findings indicate an influence of gender-related societal norms on empathetic behavior, females may score higher on self-report scales due to a greater willingness to report empathetic feelings. Besides, self-report questionnaires may predominantly measure affective empathy (Rueckert et al., 2011). In addition, women and men have been argued to differ in terms of cognitive and affective empathic processing (Christov-Moore, Simpson, Coudé, Grigaityte, Iacoboni, & Ferrari,

2014). Supporting this notion, it has been found that neural networks that contribute to affective empathic processing are more developed in females. But, gender-related differences may not be limited to affective empathy. However, so far, studies on gender differences regarding cognitive empathic processing have only yielded mixed results.

Defining ToM

ToM or mentalizing processes can be understood as an individual's ability to understand and predict other people's mental states such as their beliefs, intentions or desires (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Singer, 2006; Völlm et al., 2006). Moreover, recent studies using neuroimaging techniques indicate that a distinction between cognitive ToM and affective ToM can be drawn (Schlaffke et al., 2015; Shamay-Tsoory & Aharon-Peretz, 2007; Shamay-Tsoory, Tomer, Berger, & Aharon-Peretz, 2005). Whereas cognitive ToM is defined as the ability to make inferences about others' mental states (e.g., knowledge, goals or motivations), affective ToM concerns mental states that represent emotional states and feelings.

Further, the conceptualization of mentalizing processes involves another crucial differentiation. ToM is suggested to operate on two different levels of processing, the lower implicit and the higher explicit route (Frith & Frith, 2008; Schuwerk, Vuori, & Sodian, 2015). Implicit mentalizing acts fast, automatic but relatively inflexible, and may occur on a subconscious level. In contrast, explicit ToM is a slow, flexible, and complex process that operates consciously and requires mental effort. It is argued that the implicit type of ToM develops very early, whereas explicit ToM reasoning develops around four years of age and seems to be unique to humans (for more information, see Apperly & Butterfill, 2009). This evidence comes from tasks measuring implicit and explicit ToM reasoning (Schuwerk et al. 2015; Kulke, Johannsen, & Rakoczy, 2019). Implicit ToM tasks are based on nonverbal cues without direct instructions (e.g., anticipatory looking measures; Senju,

Southgate, White, & Frith, 2009). Explicit ToM tasks directly ask for another individual's mental state (e.g., false belief task; Wimmer & Perner, 1983).

In recent years, efforts have been made to investigate gender-related differences in mentalizing abilities between females and males (e.g., Adenzato et al., 2017; Russell, Tchanturia, Rahman, & Schmidt, 2007). Nevertheless, findings regarding gender differences in ToM are inconsistent (Christov-Moore et al., 2014), and the common assumption in social cognition that females outperform males at the attribution of others' mental states could not be supported (Russell et al., 2007). For instance, in a study by Russell et al. (2007), it was found that males performed better than females on Happé's well-established ToM cartoon task (Happé, Brownell, & Winner, 1999). This led the authors to assume that the described male advantage in mentalizing may be due to different cognitive processing styles. It is suggested that cognitive processing in males relies on systematizing (ability to analyze rule-driven behavior in systems), whereas females use empathizing strategies (ability to identify others' emotions or thoughts and respond appropriately) to attribute the mental states of others (Adenzato et al., 2017; Baron-Cohen, Richler, Bisarya, Golan, & Ashwin, 2009; Baron-Cohen, Golan, Ashwin, Ashwin, & Ashwin, 2009; Baron-Cohen, Golan, Ashwin, Ashwin, & Ashwin, 2009; Baron-Cohen, Golan, Ashwin, Ashwin, & Ashwin, 2009; Baron-Cohen, Golan, Ashwin, Ashwin, & Ashwin, 2009). Accordingly, Baron-Cohen's (2002) Empathizing-Systematizing Theory provides an explanation for gender differences in ToM. Yet, data regarding gender-related differences has been mixed and further research is needed to address this issue (Christov-Moore et al., 2014).

Linking empathy, ToM, and sexual harassment

As previously discussed, empathy and perspective taking are key factors in social interaction because both constructs refer to the ability to place oneself into another's mental or emotional shoes (Singer & Lamm, 2009). This is the basis for the understanding that people perform certain actions because of underlying mental states that may differ from individual to individual (Ward et al., 2000). Consequently, being able to interpret another

person's feelings is a necessary prerequisite for an appropriate response to the person concerned. As perspective taking modulates social understanding as well as empathic reactions, dysfunctional processing may lead to sexually harassing behaviors by misinterpreting the target's intentions (Polaschek & Ward 2002). To illustrate the stated issue, Ward et al. (2000) quote the following example:

A woman may behave in a friendly way towards a man because she considers him a friend, whereas a male might erroneously infer that she really wants to have sex with him. He might also interpret her protest behavior as coyness, and as a part of the courtship display, inferring that her interpretation (i.e., her beliefs) of the situation was the same as his. (p. 53)

This example depicts clearly that the male character fails to attribute the female's feelings. The perpetrator acts according to the wrong belief that the target shares the same sexual desires with him. In addition, the disrupted development of empathy promotes the tendency of being egocentric (Beck, 1999; cited as Polaschek & Ward, 2002, p. 400). If empathic responses are processed accurately, they eventually will prevent people from harming other individuals while promoting altruistic behavior (Singer, 2006).

Evidence suggests that men with a high propensity to sexually harass are more likely to misinterpret another person's mental or emotional state and in turn demonstrate hostile environment harassment behaviors such as repeated requests for dates or suggestive comments (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; cited as Key & Ridge, 2011, p. 1094). Furthermore, a negative relationship between the propensity to sexually harass (applies to hostile environment harassment and quid pro quo harassment) and mentalizing as well as empathizing abilities has been found for females and males (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987). These findings underline the urgent need for investigating a deficiency in empathy and ToM processes as possible risk factors for sexually harassing behavior in women and men.

Nevertheless, there is still a substantial lack of research regarding the nature of female sexual harassment (Luthar, 1995; Ménard et al., 2003) and perspective taking as a primary variable of interest in studies on sexual harassment (Zimmerman & Myers, 2013).

As a consequence, treatment programs that aim to reduce sexual aggressive behaviors mainly focus on male perpetrators and empathy enhancement (e.g., Castellino et al., 2011; Diehl et al., 2014). Poor empathy skills are acknowledged as a dynamic risk factor for sexual offending, which is why treatments for sex offenders include empathy training. Pina et al. (2009) point out that adapted strategies in sex-offender treatments also apply to perpetrators of sexual harassment. Indeed, empirical investigations discovered that empathy training resulted in a reduction of men's propensity to sexually harass others (Diehl et al., 2014). Yet, treatment initiatives including empathy training strategies specifically designed for sexual harassers remain scarce (Pina et al., 2009). Likewise, the inability to mindread accurately has been given very little attention in sexual harassment studies (Zimmerman & Myers, 2013). In contrast, within sexual aggression literature, deficits in the sex offender's ToM have been widely discussed as another possible dynamic risk factor for sexual offending (e.g., Barnett & Mann, 2013; Castellino et al., 2011; Keenan & Ward, 2000). It is suggested that perpetrators of sexual offenses show an impairment in perspective taking, which leads to distorted thinking about other people's mental state (Ward et al., 2000). For instance, child molesters demonstrate the cognitive distortion that children enjoy sexual acts like adults do (Castellino et al., 2011). This example clarifies the inability to differentiate another individual's perspective from one's own (Ward et al., 2000). It should be added that sexual offenders experience an egocentric bias in terms of perspective taking (Castellino et al., 2011; Mihailides, Devilly, & Ward, 2004). Consequently, they are less effective in making judgments from another one's perspective.

Taken together, it is argued that sexual offenders think about their targets in distorted ways that promote and facilitate their sexual aggressive behavior (e.g., Ward et al., 2000). Based on this assumption, researchers not only recommend empathy enhancement strategies in treatment programs for sexual offenders but also the inclusion of ToM training (Castellino et al., 2011). As sexual harassment may predict more violent sexually aggressive behavior such as rape (Pryor, 1987; Ward et al., 2006), and sexual offenders are believed to share some deficits with sexual harassers (Pina et al., 2009), it seems indispensable to examine the relationship between the propensity to engage in sexual harassment and empathy as well as ToM deficiencies in women and men to develop appropriate treatment and prevention approaches.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As discussed above, large parts of sexual harassment research did not focus on the internal processes of sexual harassers (see Pina et al., 2009). Though, there has been a great amount of research recently done on individual dispositions of sexual offenders, which focused on empathy and perspective taking (e.g., Barnett & Mann, 2013). Findings indicate that sex offenders have poor empathy and show deficits in their ability to see the situation from their victim's perspective. Moreover, sexual harassment seems to be linked with rape behavior (Pryor, 1987; Ward et al., 2006), which highlights the importance of investigating cognitive distortions of potential perpetrators of sexual harassment in order to identify treatments and to further reduce the likelihood of committing more serious sexual assault. Although perpetrators of sexual harassment are predominantly males, females as well demonstrate sexually harassing behaviors (e.g., McDonald, 2012; Pina et al., 2009; Russell & Oswald, 2016). Consequently, this thesis aims to ascertain if women and men with the propensity to engage in sexual harassment show deficits in empathy and/or ToM

processes. Additionally, it was examined if a gender difference related to sexual harassment propensity, empathy, and ToM processes occurs.

Based on the previously discussed research, the following hypotheses were derived for this study:

Propensity to sexually harass others and gender

H1₁: Males show a higher propensity to sexually harass than females.

H0₁: Males show a lower (or equal) propensity to sexually harass than females.

Empathy and gender

H1₂: Males score lower on empathy than females.

H0₂: Males score higher (or equal) on empathy than females.

ToM and gender

H1₃: Males show lower explicit cognitive mentalizing abilities than females.

H0₃: Males show higher (or equal) explicit cognitive mentalizing abilities than females.

H1₄: Males show higher implicit cognitive mentalizing abilities than females.

H0₄: Males show lower (or equal) implicit cognitive mentalizing abilities than females.

H1₅: Males show lower explicit affective mentalizing abilities than females.

H0₅: Males show higher (or equal) explicit affective mentalizing abilities than females.

Sexual harassment proclivity and likelihood to sexually harass

H1₆: SHP scores correlate with LSH scores.

H0₆: SHP scores and LSH scores show no correlation.

Propensity to sexually harass others and empathy

H1₇: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in empathy.

H0₇: There is no correlation between the propensity to sexually harass others and empathy.

Propensity to sexually harass others and ToM processes

H1₈: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in explicit cognitive mentalizing.

H0₈: There is no correlation between the propensity to sexually harass others and explicit cognitive mentalizing.

H1₉: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in implicit cognitive mentalizing.

H0₉: There is no correlation between the propensity to sexually harass others and implicit cognitive mentalizing.

H1₁₀: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in explicit affective mentalizing.

H0₁₀: There is no correlation between the propensity to sexually harass others and explicit affective mentalizing.

Method

Participants

A total of 203 participants was recruited via various online platforms and print flyers. The participants were supposed to be German-speaking, hetero- or homosexual and between 18 and 55 years old. Psychology students were not allowed to take part in the study because of possible knowledge about the underlying theoretical construct and/or the measurements used. Furthermore, individuals with a conviction for a sex and/or violent crime were excluded beforehand. The study was generated using the software SoSci Survey (Leiner, 2019) and was put online via the server www.soscisurvey.de between April 2019 and October 2019. Participants received a link and were able to conduct the survey at home

on their computer or laptop. They were briefed about the procedure and confidentiality of sensitive data and gave informed consent upon completing the study. Among all participants, six vouchers with a total value of 100€ (1 x 50€ and 5 x 10€) were drawn. Prior to analysis, participants with a homosexual orientation had to be excluded due to small numbers of participants ($n = 9$). The final sample consisted of 194 participants (142 females and 52 males) with a mean age of 27.24 years ($SD = 7$, age range: 18-55) and solely of European descent. The majority of participants had at least a higher education (92.8%) and were students (61.3%) at the time of the study. Roughly two-thirds of the sample (68%) reported having an income under 1500€. For more detailed information on sample characteristics, see Appendix A.

Materials

Sexual harassment proclivity. The Sexual Harassment Proclivities scale (SHP; Bartling & Eisenman, 1993) was used to assess the proclivity to engage in sexual harassment. The original scale includes ten items (e.g., “Women are flattered by sexual advances from men even when they fail to respond positively to these advances.”) and measures the tendency of an individual to engage in hostile environment harassment. This type of sexual harassment includes, for instance, repeated sexual advances or sexual jokes and is subtler than quid pro quo sexual harassment, which involves active offers for sexual favors (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016). For women, the items were rephrased (e.g., “Men are often inconsistent in terms of their non-verbal communications with women.”) to assess their attitude towards men. Since one item (“Pregnant women use their conditions to justify doing less work on many jobs in comparison to their coworkers.”) could not be adapted to men, the item was excluded in the SHP scale for women. Additionally, the English version was translated to German and then back-translated by an external person with translational competence in English and German to assure exact wording. Participants had to rate their

agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To obtain the final SHP scale score the values of each item have to be added up. Higher scores indicate a higher tendency to engage in behaviors that promote hostile environment harassment. The SHP scale has been argued to be an internal reliable instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$ for males and $\alpha = .74$ for females; Bartling & Eisenman, 1993) with an acceptable construct validity (Key & Ridge, 2011). In this study, the SHP showed high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Likelihood to sexually harass. The Likelihood to Sexually Harass scale (LSH; Pryor, 1987) was chosen to assess an individual's likelihood to sexually harass others. The original LSH scale contains ten brief hypothetical scenarios depicting different social situations in which the protagonist has the power to sexually exploit an attractive subordinate. As the original version exclusively measures men's proclivities to sexually harass women, the scale was modified to assess women's tendencies to behave in a sexually exploitive manner toward men as well. This was accomplished by changing the names of the protagonists (e.g., Michael instead of Michelle) and personal pronouns in each scenario. Additionally, common names of German-speaking countries were used instead of characteristic American names (e.g., Johanna instead of Rhonda). Moreover, the English version was translated to German and then back-translated by an external person with translational competence in English and German to assure exact wording. During the task, respondents have to imagine themselves being the protagonist and are asked to rate on three items the likelihood of performing a certain behavior. The key item comprises an alternative, in which sexual exploitation takes place and describes an act of quid pro quo sexual harassment (see Appendix B for an example). Respondents are instructed that no negative consequences would result from their chosen alternative. Each item can be rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (very likely). To obtain an overall LSH

score only the values of the key items are added up, the other two items are considered as filler items and are excluded from scoring (Krings & Facchin, 2009). Regarding the psychometric properties of the scale, excellent internal consistency reliability has been reported and construct validity has been widely demonstrated (e.g., Krings & Facchin, 2009; Lee, Gizzarone, & Ashton, 2003; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995). In this study, the internal consistency for this instrument was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$).

Empathy. The Saarbrücker Personality Questionnaire (SPF) by Paulus (2009) is the German translation and revision of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) by Davis (1983). The SPF is a self-report measure for emotional and cognitive empathy and comprises 16 items that encompass one statement each. All items can be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always) and for scoring the values of the answers have to be added up. The items are clustered in four subscales: perspective taking (PT; e.g., "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision."), fantasy (FS; e.g., "After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters."), empathic concern (EC; e.g., "I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person."), and personal distress (PD; e.g., "I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation."). While the subscales EC, FS, and PD assess emotional empathy, PT is the only subscale that measures cognitive empathy and evaluates the tendency of a person to spontaneously consider another person's psychological point of view. FS acquires the extent to which a person identifies herself/himself with fictitious characters. EC scales other-oriented feelings of compassion for an unfortunate person, whereas PD measures self-oriented feelings of anxiety in a social context. The SPF (IRI) shows satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$) considering the small number of items. Above, internal as well as external validity are considered as proven as a result of several studies (Kleih & Kübler, 2013; Paulus, 2009). In this study, the SPF showed

acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$). Table 1 demonstrates reliabilities for each of the four subscales.

Table 1
Reliability coefficients of the SPF subscales

Scale	Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α)
Empathetic Concern (EC)	.67
Fantasy (FS)	.77
Perspective Taking (PT)	.83
Personal Distress (PD)	.74

Explicit cognitive mentalizing. The Multifaceted Empathy Test (MET; Dziobek, Rogers, Fleck, Bahnemann, Heekeren, Wolf, & Convit, 2008) measures cognitive and emotional empathy. In this study, the condensed and revised version MET-CORE-II was used, which includes both a cognitive empathy condition (CE) and an emotional empathy condition (EE) to assess both facets. The task consists of 20 positive and 20 negative photographs of adults and children expressing emotions in specific situations (e.g., Edele, Dziobek, & Keller, 2013; Grynberg, Maurage, & Nandrino, 2017). The items are presented in eight blocks of either positive or negative emotional valence, whereby one block includes ten pictures. The pictures appear in randomized order within each block, and between blocks with the same emotional valence. In the CE condition participants are asked (e.g., block 1, 4, 6, and 7: "What is this person feeling?") to choose the correct emotion among four alternatives (e.g., serene, enthusiastic, curious, in love). In the EE condition (e.g., block 2, 3, 5, and 8: "How much do you feel with this person?") participants have to rate on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 9 (strongly) the degree of empathetic concern for the person presented. Consequently, the participants see each picture twice during the test. For scoring, the correct answers of the CE condition value one point and

have to be summarized. Concerning the EE condition, an average rating score has to be calculated. Each MET subscale has shown good internal consistency, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$ for the CE scale and Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ for the EE scale. Additionally, high construct validity has been reported (Dziobek et al., 2008). In the current study, only the CE scale was used to assess explicit cognitive mentalizing. The internal consistency for the CE scale was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

Implicit cognitive mentalizing. The visual perspective taking (VPT) task used by Samson, Apperly, Braithwaite, Andrews, and Scott (2010) was administered in German in this study to assess implicit cognitive ToM. In the task, participants see pictures of a gender-congruent human avatar who is positioned in the center of a room. The avatar faces either the left or the right sidewall, where red discs are displayed. Participants have to judge if a presented number (number cue ranging from 0 to 3) matches ("yes" response) or mismatches ("no" response) the number of discs visible from a given target perspective. The indicated perspective can be either the participant's perspective (self-condition; perspective cue "YOU") or the avatar's perspective (other-condition; perspective cue "SHE" or "HE") while the irrelevant perspective has to be ignored. In addition, the task comprises a consistent perspective condition (participant and avatar see the same number of discs) and an inconsistent perspective condition (participant and avatar see a different number of discs because some discs are not visible for the avatar). Correspondingly, four different conditions resulted: Self and Consistent (SC), Self and Inconsistent (SI), Other and Consistent (OC), Other and Inconsistent (OI). Like in the original study by Samson et al. (2010), mismatching ("no" response) trials were considered as filler trials because of unbalanced task difficulty. Accordingly, only data of the matching ("yes" response) trials was analyzed. The extent of interference of the irrelevant perspective on the judgment about the relevant perspective was measured by the use of reaction time (RT) and error rates (ER) to examine

implicit cognitive processing of perspectives. It was assumed that the lower the mean RTs and the higher the measured ERs, the greater the deficiency in implicit cognitive mentalizing. In the current study, a shortened version of the VPT task with two blocks of 52 test trials instead of four blocks was used (Bukowski, 2014), and the last slide was modified so that the perspective cue (“YOU”, “SHE” or “HE”) is shown together with the number cue (e.g., “YOU / 1”) because no change of RT is reported (H. Bukowski, personal communication, March 26, 2019).

Explicit affective mentalizing. The German version of the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET; Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste, & Plumb, 2001; German version: Bölte, 2005) was used to measure affective explicit mindreading. The measurement consists of 36 items composed of black and white photographs showing a person’s eye area. Each photograph depicts a different mental state and the participants have to choose the correct mental state among four alternatives that vary with each item as well (e.g., jealous, panicked, arrogant, and hateful). To assess the final score, the correct answers are added up and a higher score indicates a better ability to understand others’ mental states. The German RMET has been argued to be a reliable instrument and results suggest satisfactory construct validity (Pfaltz, Mcaleese, Saladin, Meyer, Stoecklin, Dammann, & Soelch, 2013). The internal consistency for this instrument was high (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$) in the current study.

Alexithymia. The German version of the 26-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-26; Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994; German version: Kupfer, Brosig, & Brähler, 2001) was used to evaluate the inability of an individual to identify and describe feelings in an adequate way. This self-report questionnaire consists of 26 items and comprises three scales assessing difficulty in identifying feelings (DIF; e.g., “I have feelings that I can’t quite identify.”), difficulty describing feelings (DDF; e.g., “I wish I were not so shy.”), and

externally oriented thinking (EOT; e.g., “One should look for deeper explanations.”) (Wise, Simpson, & Sheridan, 2000). The items can be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree), and to obtain the global alexithymia-score the sums of the three scales have to be summarized. Individuals with a score of 54 or above are designated alexithymic. The inner consistency of the three subscales DIF (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$), DDF (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .69$), and EOT (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .67$), and the inner consistency of the alexithymia-scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.81$) are satisfactory. Thus, the TAS-26 shows good reliability plus construct validity is reported to be verified by Kupfer et al. (2001). The alexithymia-scale of the current study showed poor reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .57$). Table 2 demonstrates reliabilities for each of the three subscales.

Table 2
Reliability coefficients of the TAS-26 subscales

Scale	Reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s α)
Difficulty in identifying feelings (DIF)	.88
Difficulty describing feelings (DDF)	.77
Externally oriented thinking (EOT)	.66

Emotional State. The German version of the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; German version: Krohne, Egloff, Kohlmann, & Tausch, 1996) was used to evaluate the current emotional state of the participants. The self-report questionnaire consists of 20 items that measure positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), whereby ten items assess mood-related positive adjectives and ten items mood-related negative adjectives. The facets PA and NA are defined as two independently varying dimensions of the same construct and include positive adjectives (e.g., active) to assess PA and negative adjectives (e.g., distressed) to measure NA (Watson & Tellegen, 1985; Watson et al., 1988). Each item can be rated on a 5-point scale (1 = very slightly or

not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, and 5 = very much) and the final score of each dimension is evaluated by summarizing the item ratings separately per scale. Consequently, high or low values mean high or low negative or positive affectivity. According to Krohne et al. (1996), the German version of the PANAS can be considered as a reliable measurement with high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .86$). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of both subscales. The internal consistency of the subscale for positive affect was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$), and for negative affect excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

Design and Procedure

Participants were told that the study aimed to explore emotion regulation. After obtaining informed consent, demographic information was enquired. The actual study was split into two main blocks within one session. The first block included three behavioral tasks: the MET to test explicit cognitive mentalizing, the VPT task to test implicit cognitive mentalizing, and the RMET to assess explicit affective mentalizing. The second block included five non-behavioral questionnaires: the SPF to test empathy, the SHP scale and the LSH scale to examine the propensity to sexually harass others, the PANAS to evaluate participants' current emotional state, and the TAS-26 to assess alexithymia. The sequence of the two blocks was fixed, but the order of the measurements in each block was randomized across all participants. As each participant was exposed to the same condition, the study constitutes a within-subject design. The study was completed within 40 minutes on average and after completing the survey, participants were given contact information to receive the actual aim of the research.

Results

All statistical analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.0 with a significance level of $\alpha = .05$ for hypothesis testing. Missing values analysis revealed

that 0.66% of the data were missing. Due to the low incidence of missing values, pairwise deletion was used. Under the assumption that outliers depict true participant responses, they were retained in all analyses. Descriptive statistics were performed on each measure (see Appendix C). Prior to correlational analysis, the data were examined concerning previously discussed gender differences. The results regarding the hypotheses $H1_1$ to $H1_6$ are presented below.

Gender differences

$H1_1$: Males show a higher propensity to sexually harass than females.

SHP. An independent samples t-test analysis was performed to test for gender differences on the SHP scale. It was found that male participants' scores ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.1$) on the SHP scale were not higher than female participants' scores ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.06$), $t(192) = -1.07$, $p = .143$ (one-tailed).

LSH. Regarding the LSH scale, a Mann-Whitney U -test was used to compare the mean ranks of female and male participants' scores. Results indicate a gender difference, with men ($n = 52$) scoring significantly higher than women ($n = 142$) on the scale, $U = 2621.50$, $p = .001$ (one-tailed).

$H1_2$: Males score lower on empathy than females.

SPF. Gender differences emerged as well for the SPF, the results regarding all four SPF subscales are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Results of t-tests comparing female and male scores on the SPF subscales ($N = 193$)

Scales	Males ($n = 52$)		Females ($n = 141$)		t	df	p value (one-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD			
EC	13.52	2.65	14.79	2.43	-3.14	191	.001
FS	12.94	3.24	14.77	2.94	-3.72	191	< .001
PT	13.92	3.04	14.31	2.85	-8.26	191	.205

PD	10.87	3.19	12.32	3.06	-2.90	191	.002
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Note. EC = Empathetic Concern; FS = Fantasy; PT = Perspective Taking; PD = Personal Distress.

H1₃: Males show lower explicit cognitive mentalizing abilities than females.

MET. Gender differences emerged as well on the two MET subscales for CE. Men ($n = 52$) scored significantly lower than women ($n = 142$), $U = 2817.50$, $p = .005$ (one-tailed) on the Positive CE subscale and on the Negative CE subscale, $U = 3040.00$, $p = .029$ (one-tailed).

H1₄: Males show higher implicit cognitive mentalizing abilities than females.

VPT. Regarding the VPT task, U -tests indicate that male participants' ranked mean RTs were significantly lower than female participants' mean RTs in all four conditions (SC: $n_{\text{Women}} = 137$, $n_{\text{Men}} = 50$, $U = 2613.00$, $p = .006$ [one-tailed]; SI: $n_{\text{Women}} = 141$, $n_{\text{Men}} = 52$, $U = 2675.00$, $p = .002$ [one-tailed]; OC: $n_{\text{Women}} = 139$, $n_{\text{Men}} = 50$, $U = 2893.00$, $p = .040$ [one-tailed]; OI: $n_{\text{Women}} = 140$, $n_{\text{Men}} = 52$, $U = 2681.50$, $p = .002$ [one-tailed]). Comparing the mean ranks of male ($n = 52$) and female ($n = 142$) participants' ERs, results reveal no significantly lower ERs for men in all conditions (SC: $U = 3274.00$, $p = .083$ [one-tailed], SI: $U = 3381.00$, $p = .169$ [one-tailed], OC: $U = 3283.50$, $p = .073$ [one-tailed], OI: $U = 3480.50$, $p = .263$ [one-tailed]).

H1₅: Males show lower explicit affective mentalizing abilities than females.

RMET. When testing the RMET task, results revealed a significant difference between male and female participants' final scores, with men ($n = 52$) scoring significantly lower than women ($n = 142$) on the scale, $U = 2933.00$, $p = .014$ [one-tailed].

Correlational analysis

Prior to the correlational analysis, data were tested for the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of outliers. As relevant assumptions were not met, non-parametric methods for the study of correlation were used. To test hypotheses

$H1_6$ to $H1_{10}$, a partial correlation analysis was performed controlling for age, education, gender, and income. Since the evaluation of the TAS-26 revealed significant correlations with main variables of interest (see Appendix D), alexithymia was added as control variable. In order to meaningfully interpret the association between variables, z-scores were used for standardization. The results are presented separately per hypothesis.

$H1_6$: SHP scores correlate with LSH scores. Spearman's correlations were computed between SHP and LSH levels. Results indicate no significant correlation for SHP and LSH scores, $r_s = .14$, $p = .053$.

$H1_7$: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in empathy. Pearson's correlation revealed no significant association between the four SPF subscales and SHP scores. Likewise, Spearman's correlation revealed no significant correlation with LSH scores. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Correlations between the SHP, LSH, and the four SPF subscales

Variable	SHP	LSH ^a	EC	FS	PT	PD
SHP	-	.14	-.03	.04	.01	.13
LSH ^a		-	-.02	-.04	.05	.05
EC			-	.37***	.39***	.30***
FS				-	.33***	.33***
PT					-	.09
PD						-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. SHP = Sexual Harassment Proclivity; LSH = Likelihood to Sexually Harass; EC = Empathetic Concern; FS = Fantasy; PT = Perspective Taking; PD = Personal Distress.

^a Spearman's correlation was used.

$H1_8$: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in explicit cognitive mentalizing. A significant correlation was found when testing the

association between SHP and MET scores for Positive CE, $r_s = -.21, p = .005$. No significant correlation was found for Negative CE and SHP scores, $r_s = -.10, p = .161$. When investigating the LSH measure, both MET subscales for CE revealed a significant correlation with LSH scores (Positive CE: $r_s = -.27, p < .001$; Negative CE: $r_s = -.27, p < .001$).

H1₉: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in implicit cognitive mentalizing. To test this hypothesis, the VPT task was analysed. It has to be noted that erroneous responses (11.54% of the data) and response omissions because of the timeout procedure (> 2000 ms; 2.77% of the data) were excluded from the data set when computing the mean RTs. The results of the RT analysis are presented in Table 5, the results of the ER analysis in Table 6.

Table 5

Spearman's Correlations between the SHP, LSH, and VPT task mean RTs

Variable	SHP	LSH	SC	SI	OC	OI
SHP	-	.14	-.05	.01	-.01	-.03
LSH		-	.01	.02	-.01	-.08
SC			-	.75***	.76***	.73***
SI				-	.81***	.70***
OC					-	.77***
OI						-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. SHP = Sexual Harassment Proclivity; LSH = Likelihood to Sexually Harass; SC = Self Consistent; SI = Self Inconsistent; OC = Other Consistent; OI = Other Inconsistent.

Table 6

Spearman's Correlations between the SHP, LSH, and VPT task ERs

Variable	SHP	LSH	SC	SI	OC	OI
SHP	-	.14	.10	.04	.18**	.08
LSH		-	.22**	.16**	.17**	.18**

SC	-	.63***	.52***	.49***
SI		-	.47***	.43***
OC			-	.51***
OI				-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. SHP = Sexual Harassment Proclivity; LSH = Likelihood to Sexually Harass; SC = Self Consistent; SI = Self Inconsistent; OC = Other Consistent; OI = Other Inconsistent.

H1₁₀: The propensity to sexually harass others correlates with a deficiency in explicit affective mentalizing. Results show no significant relationship between SHP and RMET scores, $r_s = -.12$, $p = .114$. Regarding the LSH measure, results indicate a significant correlation with RMET scores, $r_s = -.22$, $p = .003$.

Discussion

The current study aimed to provide a valuable addition to a better understanding of individual characteristics of sexual harassment. Despite a growing body of research on sexual offending, little has been learned about underlying mechanisms that promote sexually harassing behaviors (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Lee et al., 2003; Pina et al., 2009). Additionally, past research on sexual harassment especially focused on male perpetrators because the vast majority of incidents are committed by men (Espelage et al., 2016; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; McDonald, 2012). Thus, this thesis investigated underlying factors that drive sexually harassing behaviors in females and males. As recent evidence suggests that deficiencies in empathy and perspective taking are associated with sexual harassment (e.g., Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Diehl et al., 2014; Zimmerman & Myers, 2013), the proposed relationship was examined. Instead of focusing on actual perpetrators of sexual harassment, the propensity to engage in sexual harassment in the general population was assessed. In the present study, hypotheses exploring the relationship between the propensity

to sexually harass other individuals and deficits in empathy and/or ToM processes were partially supported.

To begin with, there was no evidence to suggest an association between the propensity to engage in sexual harassment and poor empathy ($H1_7$). This result is inconsistent with past research that reported a negative correlation between the propensity to engage in sexual harassment and empathy (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993). When considering the measurements used, the influence of socially desirable responding on the self-reports seems possible. In accordance with this assumption, research in the sex offender domain indicated a significant correlation between social desirability and IRI scores (Curwen, 2003). Accordingly, collected data concerning the SPF may not depict participants' *true* answers on the questionnaire. Thus, overestimated empathic behavior may contribute to the observed findings. Importantly, authors recommend administering sexual harassment measures solely under conditions where participants remain anonymous to ensure validity of the scale (Pryor, 1987). As the present study was conducted online, anonymity was preserved, yet, questions assessing sexual harassment behavior are very sensitive and people may respond in compliance with perceived societal norms. Moreover, research on sexual offending reported facing a problem concerning the operational definition of empathy deficits as being general, towards a certain group of people (e.g., children) or specific for their victim (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Curwen, 2003; Ward et al., 2006). Consequently, findings show mixed results regarding the type of empathy deficiency in sex offenders. Despite this contradictory issue regarding the definition of empathy as being more general, group or person-specific, it is commonly agreed that sexual offenders show a lack of empathy while committing their offense. In addition, some authors indicate that those empathy deficits occur especially intense referring to their victim (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Ward et al., 2006). Hence, the hypothesized relation between sexual harassment and empathy deficits might

not apply for general empathy. Additionally, it has to be taken into account that self-report measurements of empathy are suggested to lack ecological validity (Dziobek et al., 2008), which might account for insignificant results in this study.

As the MET comprises a behavioral measure for empathy, strong associations were suggested regarding the hypothesized relation between the propensity to sexually harass and poor explicit cognitive mentalizing (HI_8). Results were as expected with regard to the LSH scale indicating a low-to-moderate negative correlation. Likewise, a significant negative correlation was found between the SHP scale and the MET subscale for Positive CE. Contrary to expectations, no significant relation was found for Negative CE and SHP scores. This inconsistency in results may be explained by participants' distinct performance on the subscales. It was found that participants were better at recognizing positive emotions as opposed to negative emotions, which is in line with the findings of a study conducted by Kuypers (2017).

Testing the proposed association between sexual harassment propensities and implicit cognitive mentalizing abilities (HI_9), no significant correlation was found in all four conditions with respect to mean RTs in the VPT task. Concerning the ER analysis, results were mixed. In the OC condition of the VPT task, a low-to-moderate positive correlation between ERs and SHP scores was observed. In line with previous assumptions, the LSH scale was found to correlate with VPT task ERs in all four conditions. To interpret these findings, it should be added that previous research on individual characteristics of sexual offenders has mentioned an egocentric bias concerning perspective taking (Castellino et al., 2011; Mihailides, Devilly, & Ward, 2004). Consequently, they are argued to be less effective in making judgments from another person's perspective. Samson et al. (2010) state that the ability to put one's own perspective aside in order to take another individual's perspective relies on self-perspective inhibition, which constitutes a demanding process. Thus,

slower RTs were expected of individuals with higher scores on sexual harassment measures, and an especially strong association was assumed in inconsistent conditions when participants had to take the avatar's perspective. Slower mean RTs in the OI condition compared to other conditions were measured, which may provide indications for an egocentric intrusion. Yet, no relation to higher sexual harassment propensities was observed. Concerning the ER analysis, more errors were assumed to indicate greater difficulties in perspective taking. Though results revealed significant positive correlations between the LSH scale and all four conditions as well as between the SHP scale and the OC condition, it has to be pointed out that the sample's ERs were rather high. Compared to other studies using the VPT task (e.g., Bukowski, 2014; Samson et al., 2010), overall ERs were approximately two times higher in the current study. Because of the heightened levels of erroneous responding, it seems reasonable to interpret these findings with care.

A significant negative association between the propensity to sexually harass and deficits in explicit affective mentalizing (HI_{10}) was confirmed for the LSH measure, while no relation was found between SHP and RMET scores. Moreover, contrary to expectations, overall SHP and LSH scores were not correlated (HI_6). While surprising at first, this could be explained by the fact that the SHP and LSH scale measure different types of sexual harassment. Bartling and Eisenman's (1993) SHP scale measures hostile environment harassment, whereas Pryor's (1987) LSH scale assesses quid pro quo sexual harassment. The key difference between the two scales is that the LSH scale contains hypothetical scenarios depicting different social situations in which the protagonist has the power to sexually exploit an attractive subordinate. During the task, participants have to imagine themselves being the protagonist and are asked to rate the likelihood of performing a certain behavior. In contrast, the SHP includes ten general statements with the aim to assess subtler sexual harassment behavior and participants are asked to rate their agreement with those

statements. Thus, the LSH scale might be less susceptible to socially desirable responding because of the hypothetical scenarios used. Evidence for this assumption derives from several studies (e.g., Begany & Milburn, 2002; Krings & Facchin, 2009), and it is suggested that the framing used in the questionnaire (e.g., it is assumed that there is no need to fear sanctions for sexually harassing behavior) limits the influence of socially desirable responding. Furthermore, power models provide new insights into sexual harassment behavior (Burn, 2019; McDonald, 2012; Quick & McFadyen, 2017). Sexual harassment is believed to rely on hierarchical power relations at its core that drive sexually harassing behaviors in the context of positive power discrepancy. The LSH scale depicts this type of power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target. The described context, where the potential harasser has the opportunity to exploit the relationship of unequal power without having to fear any negative consequences, might promote the engagement in quid pro quo harassment. Additionally, it is argued that hegemonic masculinity norms and men's beliefs about power over women result in perceived "legitimate" power to sexually harass. Accordingly, Pryor (1987) has demonstrated that mental concepts of power and male dominance in men are connected with a higher likelihood to sexually harass females.

Since a growing body of literature suggests higher propensities to engage in sexual harassment of men compared to women (e.g., Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Isbell et al., 2005; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016), the present thesis addressed possible effects of gender ($H1_1$). As expected, and in line with previously discussed findings, significant gender differences were observed on the LSH scale, with men scoring higher than women. Contrary to the hypothesis, and in contrast to common findings on sexual harassment (e.g., Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016), no difference between female and male scores on the SHP scale was found. The modification of the SHP scale in the current study might provide a possible explanation. The original scale comprises statements that depict

traditional heterosexual gender roles and gender-related stereotypes, which are expected to occur in female-to-male or male-to-female social interaction (e.g., “Women often mean “maybe” or even “yes” when they say “no” to sexual advances by men.”; “It is important for men to control the initial development of their relationship with women.”). Most statements clearly include the issue of power disparity between women and men. Women are portrayed as being passive and accepting, men are described as being aggressive and dominant (Pina et al., 2009). As sexual harassment is suggested to be connected to male superiority, higher rates for men on the SHP scale appear to be a logical consequence. Further, women may agree with statements on the scale because of traditional gender role socialization, yet, a link to sexual harassment proclivities seems questionable. Most statements are exclusively addressed to male beliefs about female behavior (e.g., “Women who dress in a sexy manner at work are deliberately sending a sexual message to men.”), and agreement with these statements might solely account for male proclivities to engage in sexually harassing behaviors.

Furthermore, scientists investigating empathy and ToM have reported gender differences in task performances (Christov-Moore et al., 2014). The findings of the present study provide support for effects of gender on empathy and ToM. First of all, gender differences were evident for the SPF (HI_2). Males scored significantly lower on the EC, FS, and PD subscales for emotional empathy. No effect of gender was observed on the PT subscale for cognitive empathy. This is congruent with past studies on gender differences in empathy using the SPF (e.g., Rueckert et al., 2011). Therefore, it is suggested that gender-related differences in empathy measured by self-reports may be limited to affective empathy and findings of the current study provide evidence for this assumption. Further, it was observed that males, in contrast to female participants, demonstrated higher difficulties in explicit cognitive mentalizing (HI_3). Likewise, concerning explicit affective mentalizing

abilities (HI_5), a significant difference between female and male participants' final scores was observed, with men scoring significantly lower than women and the RMET scale. In contrast, but as expected, males performed better than females on the VPT task measuring implicit cognitive mentalizing abilities (HI_4). While the analysis of the RTs showed that males were significantly quicker than females, no significant difference was found when analyzing participants' ERs. These findings are in line with previous studies that reported inconsistent findings concerning gender differences in mentalizing abilities in women and men (Christov-Moore et al., 2014). Nevertheless, results of the present study support the notion of two different processing styles in women and men, as female participants outperformed males on emotional empathy and explicit affective ToM tasks, whereas men achieved better results when testing implicit cognitive mentalizing.

When interpreting the results, limitations have to be considered. As with most studies that use self-report measures, the influence of socially desirable answering to sensitive questions cannot be ruled out since the present study did not control for social desirability. This limitation may have contributed to insignificant associations between sexual harassment propensities and empathy as participants might have distorted their responses on relevant scales. Moreover, future studies on sexual harassment should aim to address group or person-specific empathy deficiencies, as the present study provides no evidence for an association between sexual harassment propensities and poor general empathy. Apparently, researchers exploring individual characteristics of sexual offenders suggest person-specific deficits in empathy (Barnett & Mann, 2013; Castellino et al., 2011). Yet, further research is needed to address this issue due to inconsistent results. Another possible concern with the design of the study is that both sexual harassment measures had to be modified to assess female sexual harassment. As a consequence of an extensive focus on male perpetrators and victim-reports (e.g., Berdahl, 2007; Gruber, 1998; Gutek, Murphy, & Douma, 2004;

Holland & Cortina, 2013; Sojo et al., 2016), there seems to be a substantial lack of instruments that specifically measure female sexual harassment. Though this thesis sought to provide a solution for this issue by adapting the scales, there is an urgent need for the investigation of items that capture relevant aspects of sexual harassment committed by women. Another limitation worth mentioning is the online conductance of the study. When analyzing the VPT task, surprisingly high ERs were observed. This might be traced back to a misunderstanding of test instructions or distractions during the assessment. Further, the majority of participants had at least a higher education (92.8%) and were students (61.3%) at the time of the study. Therefore, the sample cannot be considered as a fully representative.

The present study extended the small body of literature on sexual harassment and underlying factors that promote this complex type of disrupted behavior in women and men. However, the findings of the current research provide limited support for connections between sexual harassment and deficits in empathy and/or ToM. Further research needs to be done in order to better understand whether distorted empathizing and/or mentalizing abilities contribute to sexual harassment. Given the detrimental implications for targets of sexual harassment, identifying risk factors of sexual harassment is of major importance. Being able to provide new insights into underlying mechanisms that drive sexually harassing behaviors in women and men will allow for the development of fruitful prevention strategies and treatment programs to effectively reduce recidivism.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table A1 presenting sample characteristics

Table A1

General characteristics of the sample (N = 194)

	n	%
Gender		
Females	142	73.2
Males	52	26.8
Age		
18 to 24 years	83	42.8
25 to 34 years	86	44.3
35 to 44 years	17	8.8
45 to 55 years	8	4.1
Marital status		
Single	170	87.6
Married	17	8.8
Divorced	6	3.1
Registered Partnership	1	.5
Nationality		
Austria	30	15.5
Germany	158	81.4
Switzerland	3	1.5
Other	3	1.5
Highest level of education		
Compulsory education	1	0.5
Apprenticeship diploma	10	5.2
VET school	3	1.5
Higher education	74	38.2
Bachelor	75	38.7
Master	28	14.4
PhD	3	1.5
Employment		
Pupil	2	1
Student	119	61.3
Employee	57	29.4
Civil servants	4	2.1
Self-employed	5	2.6
Unemployed	4	2.1
Other	3	1.5
Income		

No income	17	8.8
Less than 500€	33	17
500€ to 1500€	82	42.3
1500 to 2500€	36	18.6
2500€ to 3500€	19	9.8
More than 4000€	7	2.5

Appendix B

Sample Scenario from the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale

Scenario #3

Imagine that you are the manager of a shipping company. One day your supervisor asks you to study the possibility of buying several computers for the office. You call up several competing companies that sell computers. Each company sends a sales representative over to your office who describes the company's products. A salesperson from company "A" calls you and asks to come to your office. You agree and the next day a very attractive woman shows up. She can offer no real reason for buying her company's products over those of the other companies. However, she seems very sexy. How likely are you to do the following things in this situation?

- a. Would you recommend her line of computers?
- b. Assuming that you are secure enough in your job that no possible reprisals could happen to you, would you agree to recommend her line of computers in exchange for sexual favors?
- c. Given the same assumptions as the last question above, would you ask her to meet you later for dinner to discuss the choice of computers?

Note. Sample scenario from "The Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale," by J. B. Pryor, in *Sexuality-Related Measures: A Compendium* (p. 298), edited by C. M. Davis, W. H. Yarber, R. Bauserman, G. Schreer, and S. L. Davis, 1998, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. Copyright 1998 by Sage.

Appendix C

Table C2 presenting descriptive statistics

Table C2

Sample sizes, means, and standard deviations of SHP, LSH, SPF, RMET, MET, VPT, TAS-26, and PANAS

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
SHP					
Female	142	23.26	0.53	9	45
Male	52	24.65	0.98	10	39
LSH	194	15.11	8.60	10	50
SPF					
EC	193	14.45	2.54	7	20
FS	193	14.27	3.12	4	20
PT	193	14.21	2.90	5	20
PD	193	11.93	3.15	4	20
RMET	194	24.11	5.94	6	34
MET					
CE positive	194	15.77	3.34	2	20
CE negative	194	14.78	3.37	3	20
VPT					
RT ^a SC	187	773	230	13	1331
RT ^a SI	193	789	239	31	1443
RT ^a OC	189	709	204	12	1280
RT ^a OI	192	837	233	38	1401
ER ^b SC	194	10.54	20.59	0	100
ER ^b SI	194	13.45	21.15	0	100
ER ^b OC	194	8.53	19.29	0	100
ER ^b OI	194	13.64	17.52	0	90.91
TAS-26					
DIF	192	16.90	6.20	7	35
DDF	192	14.23	4.11	5	24
EOT	192	14.73	3.56	6	26
Alexithymia	192	45.86	10.50	23	76
PANAS					
PA	194	26.89	7.30	10	50
NA	194	16.85	8.07	10	50

Note. SHP = Sexual Harassment Proclivity; LSH = Likelihood to Sexually Harass; SPF = Saarbrücker Personality Questionnaire; EC = Empathetic Concern; FS = Fantasy; PT =

Perspective Taking; PD = Personal Distress; RMET = The Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test; MET = The Multifaceted Empathy Test; CE = Cognitive Empathy; VPT = Visual Perspective Taking Task; SC = Self Consistent; SI = Self Inconsistent; OC = Self Consistent; OI = Self Inconsistent; TAS-26 = The 26-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale; DIF = Difficulty in identifying feelings; DDF = Difficulty describing feelings; EOT = Externally oriented thinking; PANAS = Positive and Negative Affect Scale; PA = Positive Affect; NA = Negative Affect

^a Reaction times in milliseconds

^b Error rates in percent

Appendix D

Correlational analysis TAS-26

Correlational analysis showed that overall alexithymia assessed with the TAS-26 correlated significantly with the SHP ($r[186] = .21, p = .004$) and LSH scale ($r_s = .16, p = .030$). A significant association was found between alexithymia and all four SPF subscales (EC: $r[186] = -.19, p = .009$; FS: $r[186] = -.22, p = .003$; PT: $r[186] = -.34, p < .001$; PD: $r[186] = .53, p < .001$). Alexithymia was related significantly to the RMET ($r_s = -.27, p < .001$), and to Positive CE ($r_s = -.20, p = .005$) and Negative CE ($r_s = -.19, p = .008$) measured by the MET. Further, there was a significant correlation between the TAS-26 and ERs from the VPT task in both consistent conditions (SC: $r_s = .17, p = .018$; OC: $r_s = .17, p = .022$), whereas no association was revealed in the two inconsistent conditions (SI: $r_s = .10, p = .176$; OI: $r_s = .05, p = .516$). No correlation was found between alexithymia and the VPT task mean RTs (SC: $r_s = -.04, p = .609$; SI: $r_s = .01, p = .898$; OC: $r_s = .02, p = .785$; OI: $r_s = .04, p = .626$).

Abstract

The current study sought to investigate underlying mechanisms that drive human beings to demonstrate sexually harassing behaviors (e.g., *unwanted* sexual touching or gestures). Research in the sexual offender domain has shown that individuals who commit sexual violence show deficiencies in empathy (the ability to share and understand other people's feelings) and Theory of Mind (ToM; the ability to understand and predict the mental state of others). As sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence, a link between sexually harassing behaviors and deficits in empathy and/or ToM is suggested. To examine the hypothesized relationship, the propensity to engage in sexual harassment using the Sexual Harassment Proclivity (SHP) scale and the Likelihood of Sexual Harassment (LSH) scale was assessed. The data for the present study were collected online within a sample of 142 female and 52 male participants. Contrary to expectations, correlational analyses found no significant association between empathy and the propensity to sexually harass others. Further, results regarding ToM processes and sexual harassment were mixed. The propensity to sexually harass was associated with lower cognitive mentalizing abilities. Concerning implicit cognitive mentalizing, no significant correlation with the SHP and LSH scores was found. Deficits in explicit affective mentalizing were related to the LSH, but not to SHP scores. Because past findings indicate gender-related differences regarding empathy, ToM, and the propensity to sexually harass others, effects of gender were addressed. Findings are discussed in terms of limitations of the study, theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Empathy, Theory of Mind, Perspective Taking

Zusammenfassung

Im Rahmen dieser Studie wurde untersucht, welche individuellen Faktoren mit der Neigung, andere Menschen sexuell zu belästigen (z.B. *unerwünschte* sexuelle Berührungen oder Gesten), im Zusammenhang stehen. Frühere Untersuchungen mit Sexualstraftätern konnten aufzeigen, dass sexuelle Gewalt mit Defiziten hinsichtlich Empathie (die Fähigkeit, Gefühle anderer Menschen zu teilen und zu verstehen) und Theory of Mind (ToM; die Fähigkeit, mentale Zustände anderer zu verstehen und vorherzusagen) in Verbindung steht. Da sexuelle Belästigung eine Form sexueller Gewalt darstellt, wird ein Zusammenhang zwischen sexuell belästigenden Verhaltensweisen und Defiziten betreffend Empathiefähigkeit und/oder ToM angenommen. Um diese Annahme zu testen, wurde die Neigung, sexuell belästigendes Verhalten zu zeigen, mittels der Sexual Harassment Proclivity (SHP) Skala und der Likelihood of Sexual Harassment (LSH) Skala gemessen. Die Daten für die vorliegende Studie wurden online anhand einer Stichprobe von 142 weiblichen Teilnehmerinnen und 52 männlichen Teilnehmern gesammelt. Entgegen der Erwartung fanden durchgeführte Korrelationsanalysen keinen signifikanten Zusammenhang zwischen Empathiefähigkeit und der Neigung, andere sexuell zu belästigen. Die Untersuchung von ToM-Prozessen und sexueller Belästigung zeigte gemischte Ergebnisse. Die Neigung, andere sexuell zu belästigen, korrelierte mit einer geringeren Ausprägung in explizit kognitiver ToM, während kein Zusammenhang zur implizit kognitiven ToM festgestellt wurde. Defizite in explizit affektiver ToM waren mit einer erhöhten Ausprägung des LSH Levels verknüpft. Da frühere Ergebnisse auf geschlechtsspezifische Unterschiede betreffend Empathie, ToM und der Neigung zu sexueller Belästigung anderer hinweisen, wurden Geschlechtsunterschiede in die Untersuchung mit aufgenommen. Die Ergebnisse werden im Hinblick auf Einschränkungen der Studie sowie theoretische und praktische Implikationen diskutiert.

Schlagwörter: Sexuelle Belästigung, Empathie, Theory of Mind, Perspektivenübernahme