

**Sexualization of the Work Environment and Emotional Exhaustion:
The Case of Emerging India**

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the relationship between sexualization of the work environment and emotional exhaustion, and develops some key antecedents of sexualization of the work environment. It was conducted in an emerging society, India, with high rate of crime against women, particularly related to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Design/methodology/approach - To test hypotheses, structural equation modelling was performed. The hypotheses were tested with data from 1101 white collar workers in India in three ways.

Findings - Contact with other gender and flexible work arrangements were positively associated with sexualization of the work environment; and sexualization of the work environment was positively associated with emotional exhaustion. In addition, sexualization of the work environment mediated the relationship between the two antecedent variables and emotional exhaustion.

Research limitations/implications - There is a possible bias arising from the use of cross-sectional data. However, a number of methods were implemented to minimize it, including survey design and data analysis.

Practical implications - The study offers some important suggestions for workplaces with a greater proportion of young male employees, particularly in a societal context like India.

Originality/value – The paper provides evidence of the negative impact of sexualization of the work environment, and thereby contributes to current understanding of the “dark side” of behavior at work that might have significant impact on society.

Keywords: sexualization at work; emotional exhaustion; contact with other gender; flexible work arrangements.

There has been extensive discussion of sexualized behavior in the workplace for the past 30 years (Fleming, 2007). Some of this interest may have been triggered by the introduction of the term “sexual harassment” in the 1970s (Hearn & Parkin, 2001) and sexual harassment continues to be a thriving research domain. In view of the large volume of research on sexual harassment and aggression, we focus on the non-harassing, indirect, contextual aspect of social-sexual behavior, termed *sexualization at work*, which has been relatively neglected by scholars though it is one of the three components of social sexual behavior at work, namely sexualization, sexual harassment, and non-harassing social-sexual behaviors (Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990). Therefore, it is important to investigate whether these relatively common behaviors could have any negative effects in the workplace. Accordingly, this study focuses on a form of social sexual behavior at work, i.e., sexualization at work.

The limited research that exists on this topic has mainly focused on some potential consequences of sexualized work environments, such as lower job satisfaction (Burke & McKeen, 1992). Building on this research stream, this study theorizes a direct relationship between sexualization at work and emotional exhaustion developed from the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The paper, therefore, contributes to the research stream on the dark side of organizational behavior, which focuses on the negative impacts of neutral or positive constructs.

This study makes another contribution with regard to its choice of research setting, i.e., India. Unlike the majority of research that has been undertaken in WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010), which have more liberal values; this study collected data from an Eastern country, i.e., India, which has more traditional conservative values. With India emerging as a major player on the world economic

scene, the increased prosperity of the middleclass and a more global mindset are bringing a Western influence to its culture. Thus, investigating the topic of sexualization at work in the Indian context is important for at least two reasons. First, sexual harassment and assaults are becoming critical social issues in India (Jaising, 2013), with recent research finding that four out of five Indian women are sexually harassed in public places (Express News Service, 2016). Therefore, awareness of these behaviors in the workforce is relatively high. There is a likelihood of observing certain negative consequences of sexualized work environment under the current social and legal setup in India than what was possible earlier. Second, globalization and outsourcing of work (Friedman, 2008) are facilitating the increased participation of Indian women in the workforce (e.g., call center operators), and this, in turn, is increasing the sexualization of the (hitherto male-dominated) work environment. This relatively recent increased sexualization of the work environment would have an impact on several individual-, group-, and organization-level concepts. Thus, our study is a first step in unpacking this complex phenomenon outside the WEIRD contexts. Further, the lessons from India, which is one of the leading Eastern economies, are likely to be generalizable to other countries in Asia as they go through their own growth trajectories.

Theoretical Background

Conservation of Resources Theory and Sexualization at Work

Conservation of resources (COR) theory refers to the resources that individuals accumulate to accommodate, withstand, or overcome stresses/threats (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory proposes that individuals are motivated to acquire and protect resources, which can be anything that they value (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources can be categorized as conditions, objects, personal characteristics, and energy (Halbesleben, Harvey & Bolino, 2009). According to this theory,

individuals experience stress whenever resources are depleted. Thus, although sexualization can be seen as a resource at work as it may provide fun, and humor, and can make people feel more energetic if it is consensual (Aquino et al., 2014), it can be resource-depleting when it is not.

The concept of sexualization in organizations has evolved over the years. It was first introduced by Schneider (1985) whose *workplace sexualization* construct encompassed all consensual and coerced sexual interactions at work. Subsequently, Gutek et al. (1990, p. 560) defined social-sexual behavior at work as “any non-work-related behavior having a sexual component, including harassment, flirting, and making sexual jokes”. More recently, Aquino et al. (2014, p. 220) defined social sexual behavior as “workplace interactions occurring between two or more organizational members (including clients and customers) that are construed by the parties involved as having sexual connotations, but that are *not necessarily* perceived by one or more parties involved as having a threatening or harassing intent. Such behaviors can include flirting, complimenting each other’s physical appearance, gentle touching, sexual innuendos, banter about sexual topics, sharing sexual stories, and dirty jokes”. Gutek (1985) found that sexual harassment is more likely to occur in sexualized work environments. Building on Gutek’s pioneering work, Burke and McKeen (1992) reported that the more sexualized the work environment, the lower was the job satisfaction among women.

The relationship between men and women, and among those sexes is a complex process of social exchange (Cosmides, 1989). Social exchange includes social sexual behavior. In this study, we consider only the behaviors involving individuals of the opposite sex in a conservative culture like India. In sexualized work environments, sexual components are exchanged and discussed naturally among individuals in mixed-gender groups. In other words, behaviors such as being flirtatious, sexual joking, bantering and sensual language, or even touching are

commonplace (Gutek, 2001). The sexualization of the work environment is partially influenced by managers who either encourage or discourage sexual behavior of their employees (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009). This, in turn, tends to influence an employee's social-sexual behavior in the workplace. Individuals working in sexualized environments might respond differently to behavior that has a sexual component, compared with people who do not work in such environments.

In her seminal work on sexual behaviors in workplace, Gutek (1985) found that not all employees experience such behaviors negatively, and in fact, many employees actually enjoyed being the object of a colleague's sexual attention. Building on this, Aquino et al. (2014) reviewed past studies that found evidence of some of the psychological and social benefits that can accrue from social sexual behavior. These benefits include enhanced self-esteem and social inclusion, work engagement (Fleming, 2007), energy, vigor and creativity (Fleming, 2005), and stress relief (Dougherty, 2001) at the individual-level, and team camaraderie and cohesion at the group-level (Aquino et al., 2014).

Whether social sexual behaviors at work have positive or negative consequences depends on the context (Aquino et al., 2014). This study investigates the relationship between sexualization at work and emotional exhaustion of white collar workers in India, which has not been studied before. It also considers the influence of two antecedents, i.e., contact with other gender, and flexibility in work arrangements on sexualization at work. *The first* antecedent has been found to have a positive effect on sexualization at work (e.g., Gutek et al., 1990), but the research has been conducted in WEIRD context (Henrich et al. 2010). *The second* antecedent has been chosen to reflect the current trends in the way work is carried out, with particular reference to the practice of teleworking that affords employees the flexibility to work at the time and place

of their choice. Finally, the mediating role of sexualization of the work environment between the first two antecedents and emotional exhaustion was examined. The theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 here

Hypothesis Development

Contact with Other Gender and Sexualization at Work

The ‘contact hypothesis’ is one of the most parsimonious explanations for sexualized work environments (Gutek et al., 1990). As articulated originally by Homans (1950), it refers to a positive relationship between the frequency of interaction or contact between two people and the degree of liking they have for each other. This hypothesis has been found to hold for two individuals in general, individuals of opposite sex, and individuals of different race or ethnicity.

With regard to social sexual behavior, Gutek et al. (1990, p. 563) state “a woman cannot be propositioned by a man at work unless she comes into contact with at least one man. The more men she comes into contact with at work, the more likely it is that she will be propositioned by a man or hear a man tell sexual jokes.” Typically, the contact hypothesis with regard to social sexual behavior has been tested in Western or developed societies. Research has found that in contexts where people of one gender (e.g., women) have moved into jobs (i.e., law enforcement) that were traditionally held by the other gender (e.g., men), they would be outnumbered by the other gender, and there is likely to be more social sexual behavior (Aquino et al., 2014).

This study challenges the assumptions underlying existing literature by examining empirically whether the contact hypothesis holds in the Eastern context. This is important

because Eastern societies historically tend to be more conservative, with less contact between the sexes. With the trends of globalization, there has been an increase of employment (Bhalla, 2008) and an increased presence of women in historically male-dominated workforce (Kumar & Bhatt, 2012). For instance, Kumar and Bhatt (2012) report that in the period 1983-2010, there has been an increase in the proportion of females engaged in industrial and services sectors in India. With the goal of verifying research findings in a new context, we predict that the greater the contact between men and women in the workplace, the greater would be the attraction between them, and the greater would be the sexualization at work.

H1: Contact with other gender is positively associated with the sexualization at work.

Flexible Work Arrangements and Sexualization at Work

Flexible work arrangements are options that allow work to be accomplished outside of the traditional temporal and/or spatial boundaries of a standard workday and workplace (Shockley & Allen, 2007), and have been facilitated by recent breakthroughs in communication technology. Availability of broadband, personal digital assistants, and smart phones has resulted in an increase in remote working. Practices such as telework and the virtual office (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003) mean that employees can increasingly elect to work from home, in satellite offices, from neighborhood work centers, and on the road (Barsness, Diekmann, & Seidel, 2005). Flexible work arrangements do not imply that employees are never based in the co-located office. Rather, it is typically a mix of some remote working and some co-located working. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) reported that fewer than 10 percent of telecommuting employees work exclusively from outside the office, and part-time arrangements (e.g., telecommuting along with more conventional work arrangements) are the norm.

Flexible work arrangements have become increasingly prevalent in workplaces and this

“suggests a received wisdom of positive outcomes or clear benefits of telecommuting for firms and their employees” (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). However, despite its widespread prevalence, research on the whole is inconclusive whether the impact of flexible work arrangements is positive or negative (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). For instance, one of the most important reasons for the introduction of flexible work arrangements was to help alleviate employees’ work-family conflict, but research demonstrating a link between flexible work arrangements and work-family conflict is inconsistent (Shockley & Allen, 2007).

It is posited that flexible work arrangements can facilitate and accelerate the sexualization of the work environment. This is because the physical location and common hours of work of the traditional organization could act as mechanisms of social control. Employees’ attire and behaviors would be constrained in a typical office environment. It should be noted here that in the context of Asian developing societies, due to social media spillover (Maineiro & Jones, 2013), a substantial number of love cafes and hotels are being built in big cities to serve the need of “office romance” (Lin, 2008), particularly with the pay-the-way of flexible work arrangements that allows workers not to be in the office for eight hours every day (Masuda et al., 2012). Flexible work arrangements afford the opportunities that could result in greater sexualization in perceptions and interactions. The closeness and time availability that develops between colleagues outside the office would then inevitably spill over into the office space (since most organizations follow the mixed model of some remote working and some co-located working) and lead to more sexual tensions among employees and greater sexualization of the workplace.

H2: The greater the flexible work arrangements provided by the organization in terms of time and place with regard to performing a job, the higher the sexualization at work.

Sexualization of the Work Environment and Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is an important workplace outcome, because a large number of studies have shown the negative effects of emotional exhaustion on employee attitudes, health, and performance (Bozionelos & Kiamou, 2008). According to Sardeshmukh, Sharma, and Golden (2012), exhaustion can happen when individuals feel unable to cope with the demands placed upon them. Exhaustion implies a depletion of emotional and mental energy (Moore, 2000). An emotionally exhausted employee experiences “a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up” (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, p. 623). Burnout comprises three components, i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), and emotional exhaustion is the only one out of these three components that has been studied as an independent construct. This study follows in this tradition and focuses on emotional exhaustion.

The antecedents to emotional exhaustion, inter alia, include job demands such as role conflict, role stress, high workload, and stressful events (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), surface acting and deep acting (Grandey, 2003), and abusive supervision (Wu & Hu, 2009). As stated previously, sexualization at work such as sexual jokes and comments, sexually attractive dressing, or flirtatious behavior can be seen a human capital resource to provide fun and energy at work, if it is at a moderate level. However, a work environment that has high level of seductive behaviors is more likely to distract people. For example, a focus on sexual appearance through one’s clothes might mean seeking the approval of others and giving them control, and that could elevate one’s anxiety. In line with the conservation of resource theory, it is proposed that:

H3: The greater the sexualization of the work environment, the more employees suffer from emotional exhaustion.

Shrout and Bolger (2002) argued that if a variable (X) has a distal effect on an outcome (Y) and if another variable (M) exists such that the effects X-M and M-Y are medium in size, then the direct effect of X on Y may not be significant. In our conceptual model, we take a similar approach. Since there is no specific theory to suggest a strong relationship between gender contact and emotional exhaustion or between flexible work arrangements and emotional exhaustion, we do not suggest hypotheses for the direct effects of these two distal concepts on emotional exhaustion. Instead, since H3 states an association between sexualization and emotional exhaustion, and H1 and H2 state an association of gender contact and flexible work arrangements with sexualization, these three hypotheses taken together imply the mediating role of sexualization.

H4: Sexualization of the work environment mediates the relationship between contact with other gender and emotional exhaustion.

H5: Sexualization of the work environment mediates the relationship between flexible work arrangements and emotional exhaustion.

Methodology

Research Setting

This study is particularly topical as India has been driven by a sexual assault case involving one of its most celebrated investigative journalists (Jaising, 2013). In that newspaper article, Jaising also discussed another allegation of sexual harassment by a Federal Supreme Court Judge against an intern. According to the author, two of India's most important institutions, judiciary and press, witnessed sexual harassment/assault cases and the action taken against the accused was ineffective. Echoing a similar concern, an ActionAid UK survey revealed that nearly four out of five Indian women are sexually harassed in public places (Express New Service, 2016).

Research Sample

An online survey was posted on MTurk, and targeted respondents in India. One important requirement for participants was that they must have a job or work experience. Following the online posting of the survey, 1098 completed questionnaires were collected. Of the total respondents, 64.4 percent were male. The majority of participants had at least one educational degree (90.2%), and worked in the private sector (57.3%). The age ranged from 18 years to 72 years, with about 30 years being the average. The skew of respondents toward qualified younger males reflects the workforce of India where some 184,000 engineers graduate each year, most of whom are men (Keertana, 2013). The tenure of the respondents ranged from less than a year to 47 years, with 4.06 years being the average tenure. A summary of the demographic information of respondents is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 here

Measures

To minimize common method bias, the advice of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012) was followed in designing the online survey. Accordingly, the scale items for the dependent variable were placed at the beginning, followed by sexualization and other antecedent variables, in order to make it less likely for respondents to anticipate the link among all the variables.

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was measured by the three-item scale developed by Iverson, Olekalns and Erwin (1998). A confirmatory factor analysis showed support for the three items as indicators of an underlying latent construct (Chi-Square = 2.72, df = 1, $p > .05$, NFI = .995, CFI = .997, RMSEA = .04).

Sexualization of work environment. The eight-item scale developed by Gutek et al. (1990) was used in this study. This scale includes items that assess how common it is in the employee's workplace to hear sexual jokes, or to see flirtatious behavior or people dressing in a sexually attractive way, etc. A confirmatory factor analysis was done on the scale items for a single-factor model. The results showed support for the eight items as indicators of an underlying latent construct (Chi-Square = 90.2, $df = 13$, $p < .05$, NFI = .986, CFI = .988, RMSEA = .08).

Contact with other gender. An adaptation of three items of the scale developed by Gutek et al. (1990) was made. A confirmatory factor analysis showed support for the three items as indicators of an underlying latent construct (Chi-Square = 7.55, $df = 1$, $p < .05$, NFI = .996, CFI = .997, RMSEA = .08).

Flexible work arrangements. Four-item scale of flexible work arrangements developed by Hill et al. (2001) was adapted to measure flexible arrangements available to the employee in the workplace. A confirmatory factor analysis showed support for the four items as indicators of an underlying latent construct (Chi-Square = 3.22, $df = 2$, $p > .05$, NFI = .998, CFI = .999, RMSEA = .024).

Discriminant validity. In order to verify whether the measures for gender contact, flexibility, sexualization, and emotional exhaustion were distinct from each other, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on all the items of the four scales. The four-factor solution of items loaded on the corresponding scales vis-a-vis six possible combinations of three-factor models. For the four-factor model, the model discrepancy function, Chi-Square was 518.28 ($df = 120$, $p < .05$). The model fit indices were: Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .951, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .961, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .056. The fit indices were acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The errors of certain items within a factor were correlated

to improve the model fit, consistent with practice (Cole, Ciesla, & Steiger, 2007).

Control Variables. In a recent article, Bernerth and Aguinis (2016) conducted a review of the usage of control variables in organizational research and provided some recommendations. While the control variables are not the focal independent variables of research, if there is a rationale for their relationship with the focal variables, and if in their absence, there is a suspicion of a contaminated relationship between the focal variables, their inclusion would add value. Therefore, control variables included in this study were age, gender, educational qualification, marital status, and tenure.

Results

The descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 2. The conceptual model (Figure 1) was tested with the help of structural equation modeling using the EQS 6.1 software. The hypotheses were tested in three ways. First, the analysis was conducted only with observed variables (and not latent variables), which were calculated as the average scores of the scale items for a particular construct. Five control variables were included in this model. Second, the five control variables were excluded to compare the results with the first analysis. In the third model, single indicators of latent variables were used. The results are presented in each of the three analyses.

Table 2 here

Though the conceptual model in Figure 1 does not show the effect of control variables, the five control variables (age, gender, qualification, marital status, and tenure) were included to account for possible confounding effects. In four equations, these five control variables served as predictors of the four observed variables (gender contact, flexible work arrangements,

sexualization of work environment, and emotional exhaustion) in the conceptual model. Control variables were set to correlate with each other in the model. In order to account for the relationship between flexible work arrangements and gender contact, their disturbance terms were correlated. The disturbance terms in the case of latent variables are similar to the error or residual terms in the case of regression models with observed variables. The disturbance terms incorporate the effects of variables that are not specified in the model. The model discrepancy function, Chi-Square was 4.295 ($df = 2, p > .05$). The two degrees of freedom correspond to the two missing paths from gender contact and flexible work arrangements to emotional exhaustion. The fit indices were: NFI = 0.997, CFI = 0.998, and RMSEA = .032. Thus, based on the recommended values for fit indices (Hu & Bentler, 1999), our overall model had an acceptable fit.

Our conceptual model in Figure 1 shows the effects of gender contact and flexible arrangements on emotional exhaustion to be fully mediated by sexualization. Therefore, it was important to compare the fully mediated model with the partially mediated model. The partially mediated model is the saturated model with zero degrees of freedom, since two new paths from gender contact and flexible work arrangements to emotional exhaustion would be added. Therefore, the change in Chi-Square is 4.295 for a change of two degrees of freedom, as mentioned in the above paragraph. The critical value of Chi-Square for two degrees of freedom (Type-1 error = .05) is 5.99. Therefore, the change in Chi-Square was non-significant when two paths in the fully mediated model were removed. Therefore, the fully mediated model was found to be superior to the partially mediated model.

Table 3 and Figure 2 here

As indicated in Table 3 (b), the standardized path coefficient ($=0.313$) was significant and positive for the direct effect of gender contact on sexualization of work environment thereby providing support for H1. The positive effect ($=0.063$) of flexible work arrangements on sexualization was also significant and thus, there was support for H2. As shown in Table 3 (a), sexualization of the work environment was positively related to emotional exhaustion and the value was statistically significant. Thus, H3 was also supported. These results are presented in Figure 2.

According to Shrout and Bolger (2002), in order to study the indirect effect of variable A on variable C through variable B, it is not essential that variable A must be directly related to variable C. The total effect of a variable A on another variable C is decomposed into an indirect effect through an intervening variable B and a direct effect. The statistical significance of the indirect effect indicates whether there is support for the mediation hypothesis. Table 3 (a) decomposes the effects of the distal variables (gender contact and flexibility) on emotional exhaustion. Gender contact had a significant, positive total effect ($=0.123$) on emotional exhaustion. The entire effect was indirect or mediated through sexualization of work environment. That is, gender contact was positively related to sexualization, which, in turn, was positively related to emotional exhaustion. Therefore, H4 was supported. Similarly, flexible work arrangements had a significant, positive total effect ($=0.025$) on emotional exhaustion. The entire effect was indirect or mediated through sexualization of work environment. Thus, there was support for H5. The standardized total effect is also an indicator of effect size for a mediation model (Preacher & Kelley, 2011).

The significance of indirect effect is based on Sobel's (1987) test in the EQS software. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), Sobel's approach can work well in large samples

where the normality assumptions for the product of regression coefficients (that is, the indirect effect) are more likely to be true. With the sample size of 1098, it is quite likely the results based on Sobel's test would be reliable. However, Hayes (2009) recommends bootstrapping as an alternative. Using the bootstrapping approach, the indirect relationship between gender contact and emotional exhaustion was significant with the bias-corrected 95% confidence interval = [0.004, 0.294]. With the bootstrapping analysis, the indirect relationship between flexible work arrangements and emotional exhaustion was non-significant.

Bernerth and Aguinis (2016) suggested that authors must report results of the analysis with and without control variables. Accordingly, in the second analysis, the observed variables were retained, but the five control variables were dropped out. When the five control variables were dropped, the model discrepancy function, Chi-Square was 4.417 ($df = 2, p > .05$). This is in comparison to the Chi-Square value of 4.295 reported in the earlier analysis. The fit indices were as follows: NFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA = .033. The fit indices values obtained in the earlier analysis were: NFI = 0.997, CFI = 0.998, and RMSEA = .032. Thus, the fit indices were very similar to the previous case when control variables were included. However, the main difference was that the relationship between flexible work arrangements and sexualization was not significant ($p < .10$) when the control variables were dropped. Since the control variables serve an important purpose of specifying a more complete theoretical model, the previous analysis that showed a significant relationship between flexible work arrangements and sexualization might have greater validity.

On the basis of the above analyses, there is evidence for the mediating role of sexualization in the relationship between gender contact and emotional exhaustion. There is comparatively less support for the mediating role of sexualization in the relationship between

flexible work arrangements and emotional exhaustion as the relationship between flexible work arrangements and sexualization was not significant in one of the two cases. In addition, the significance tests with bootstrapping were weaker compared to the ones based on Sobel's test as reported in EQS.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on a large sample from an emerging society, India, with high rate of crime against women, particularly related to sexual harassment and sexual assault (Express News Service, 2016), this study's findings significantly contribute to the theory, practice and society of this topical issue. The theoretical, practical and social implications are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Theoretical Implications

This study has replicated and triangulated the research finding that contact with the other gender leads to greater sexualization at work. This is a specific manifestation of the general 'contact hypothesis' (Gutek et al., 1990). This might be the consequence, for instance, of sexist talk about women in lads' mags that may afford men the power to normalize very egregious sexist beliefs about women (Horvath, Hegarty, Tyler & Mansfield, 2012). The relationship between contact with other gender and sexualization at work that had hitherto been tested only in Western contexts appears to hold for Eastern contexts as well. This finding also supports Quinn's work (Quinn, 1977) on the impact of sexualization at work in an emerging economy like India.

This study contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of flexible work arrangements (i.e., wherein employees have more flexibility in scheduling where and when to work and what to do). Although flexible work arrangements have been beneficial for individuals and businesses with regard to work-life balance (Hill et al., 2001), this study indicates that flexible work arrangements might trigger sexualization at the workplace. The

finding provides additional evidence for the controversial role of flexible work arrangements (Shockley & Allen, 2007).

In particular, aligned with the conservation of resource theory, the findings show that sexualization at work in the context of a conservative society like India is positively associated with emotional exhaustion. In other words, sexualized workplace can make employees emotionally exhausted. Employees' conservation of resources/emotions can be easily depleted in sexualized workplaces. This study shows that this 'less serious form of social-sexual behavior', in fact, can do further harm for employees and businesses, apart from lower job satisfaction (Burke & McKeen, 1992). It challenges the assumption that sexualized work environment can be a source of energy (Fleming, 2005), work engagement (Fleming, 2007), or stress relief (Dougherty, 2001), at least in the context of India.

Finally, this study indicates an indirect impact of contact with other gender and flexible work arrangements on emotional exhaustion, mediated through sexualization at work. In other words, the more the contacts with the opposite sex at work, and the greater the flexible work arrangements, the more the employees are likely to feel emotionally exhausted. This appears to contradict the existing literature; for example, that job flexibility would lead to higher job satisfaction (Origo & Pagani, 2008). However, based on the results of this large study, a possible explanation is that contact with other gender and flexible work arrangements increase the sexualization at work, which, in turn, increase the level of emotional exhaustion.

In separate analyses of the model for male and female employees, we did not find any difference in the relationships among the variables. Thus, our results show that sexualisation has detrimental consequences for women as well as men.

Practical Implications

Findings from this study offer some important suggestions for workplaces with a greater proportion of young male employees, particularly in a societal context that is similar to that of India. First, a sexualized work environment can be directly harmful to employees, and indirectly to business and society. Thus, managers/leaders should take a more appropriate approach towards social-sexual behavior at work, including the non-harassing behavior, as it could lead to emotional exhaustion of people. Managers and leaders might believe sexual banter could be a positive thing. However, our research suggests there could be negative effects from seemingly innocuous behavior.

Second, although flexible work arrangements reflect a big shift in employment practice (Christensen & Schneider, 2010), its impacts are still controversial (Shockley & Allen, 2007). Our study identified a negative impact of flexible work arrangements. Thus, managers, particularly those outside the Western context, should employ workplace flexibility with caution. This study indicates that if flexibility is misused, it could cause sexualized work environment, which, in turn, could lead to emotional exhaustion. It suggests that business should develop and implement explicit code of conduct related to sexualized behavior.

Social Implications

The above implications can be useful for not only India, but also other societal contexts, like Pakistan, China, Indonesia, or Vietnam as a few examples where males historically dominate society, and females are not treated equally. This study will open a new perspective in the area of sexualization at work in the Eastern context. In Western cultures, employees do not have many socializing opportunities at or after work, and they tend to spend most of their time with family, accounting for nearly 80 percent of their time (Bryson & MacKerron, 2015). In contrast, the picture is very different in the Asian context, particularly in collectivist cultures and places with

hot weather. In these places, male employees prefer to mingle with their colleagues after work for drinks or sports, and female employees go out together for shopping. An increasing number of hotels have been built near office areas in Asian countries to meet the demand of ‘personal affairs’ during lunch breaks or after work. This phenomenon might be very relevant for sexualization at work, but it has not received any attention by researchers.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study must be carefully interpreted in the presence of certain limitations. First, although this study is based on a large sample, it is a single study undertaken in one country. In addition, although the study did not intentionally target male and young population, the analysis was based on a young- and male-dominated sample. Although the sample reflects the demographics of work place in India, it may affect the generalizability of the results. Second, although common method bias was minimized, it may still exist because information on the dependent as well as independent variables was collected from the same source. However, it does not seem feasible to collect information on emotional exhaustion from a different source other than respondents, because it is a personal and subjective experience. Thus, future research should extend the current study to different cultures and demographic segments.

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Table 1**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

	Number	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Male employees	707 (64.4%)			
Female employees	391 (35.6%)			
Employees who were married/partnered	545 (49.6%)			
Employees who were single	554 (50.4%)			
Age (years)		29.74	18	72
Respondents with master's or Ph.D. degrees	276 (25.1%)			
Tenure (years)		4.06	0 (a few months)	47

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

S. No.	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Age	29.74	8.68	--								
2	Gender	--	--	.09**	--							
3	Qualification	2.86	.63	-.02	-.12**	--						
4	Marital status	--	--	.56**	.27**	-.10**	--					
5	Tenure	4.06	4.64	.57**	-.03	.01	.35**	--				
6	Gender contact	4.83	1.31	-.08**	-.04	.02	-.07*	.00	.84			
7	Flexibility	5.08	1.12	.00	.04	.01	.03	-.02	.25**	.82		
8	Sexualization	3.52	1.52	-.24**	-.16**	.09**	-.20**	-.14**	.35**	.14**	.93	
9	Emotional exhaustion	4.38	1.17	-.15**	-.06	.07*	-.13**	-.05	.17**	.11**	.41**	.68

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Note. The diagonal elements are scale reliabilities, wherever applicable.

Table 3

Results of Path Analysis with Observed Variables

a) Decomposition of effects on emotional exhaustion

Antecedent variable	Total effect (Standardized)	Indirect effect (Standardized)	Direct effect (Standardized)
Gender contact	.123**	.123**	0
Flexibility	.025*	.025*	0
Sexualization	.392**	0	.392**

b) Direct effects on sexualization of work environment

Antecedent variable	Direct effect (Standardized)
Gender contact	.313**
Flexibility	.063*

** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Note. The effects of control variables were included in the above analysis, but have not been shown in the above tables as these were not the focal variables of the study. In another analysis, the hypotheses were tested by omitting the control variables. The main difference was that the relationship between flexibility and sexualization was not significant ($p < .10$). More detailed results are available with the authors.

Figure 1
Conceptual Model

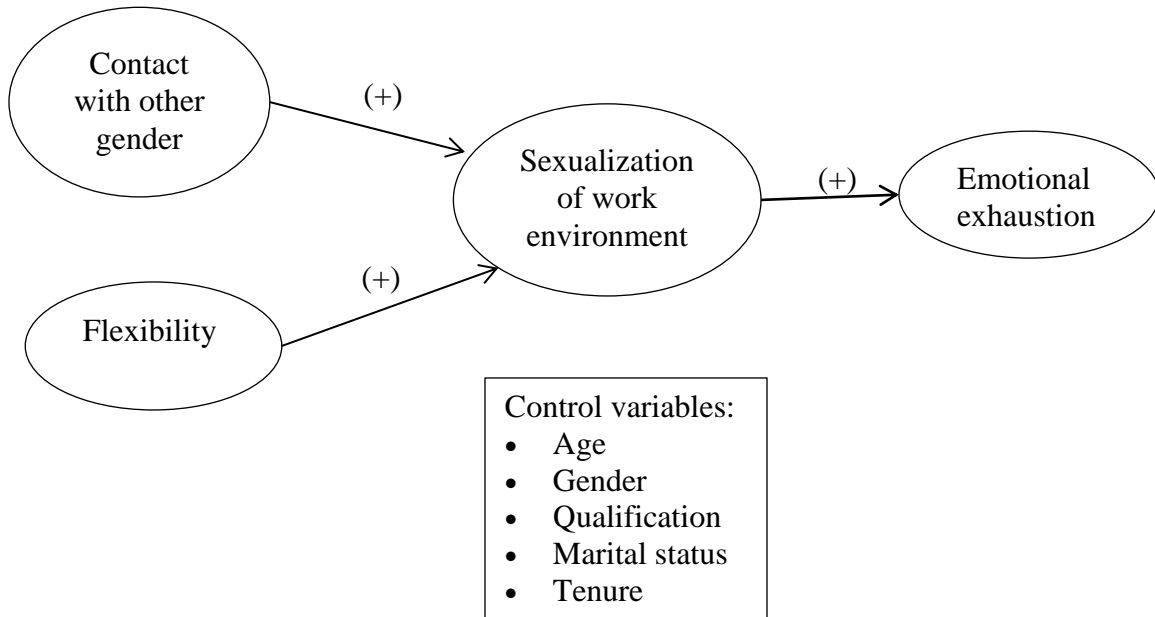
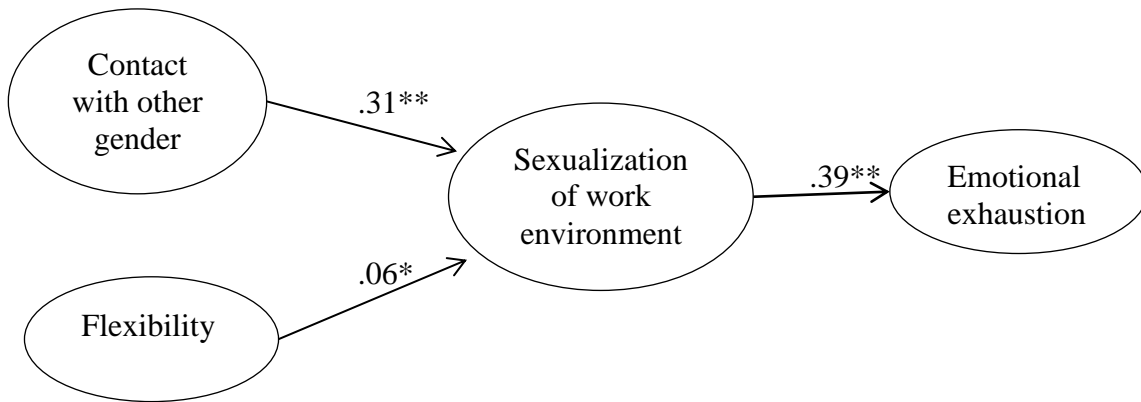


Figure 2
Path Analysis Results



** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Note. The above results were for an analysis done on the observed variables. The effects of control variables (age, gender, qualification, marital status, and tenure) were included in the above analysis, but have not been shown in the above figure as these were not the focal variables of the study.

Appendix: Measurement Scales (All the items were answered using Likert-type scale.)

Gender Contact (Gutek et al., 1990)

1. How much opportunity is there for job-related talk with men/women?
2. How much opportunity is there to talk socially with men/women?
3. How much of the time does your job require that you work with men/women?

Flexibility (Hill et al., 2001)

1. How much flexibility do you have in selecting the location of where you work?
2. How much flexibility do you have in scheduling when you do your work (e.g., scheduling hours, time of day, etc.)?
3. How much flexibility do you have in scheduling what work you will do (e.g., content of work, processes used, etc.)?
4. I have sufficient flexibility in my job to maintain adequate work and personal and family life balance.

Sexualization of Work Environment (Gutek et al., 1990)

1. Would you say that joking or talking about sexual matters at your work place happens frequently?
2. Where you work, how much social pressure is there for women to flirt with men?
3. Where you work, how much social pressure is there for men to flirt with women?
4. How much of a problem at your work place do you consider sexual harassment to be?
5. How many women dress to appear sexually attractive to men at work?
6. How many men dress to appear sexually attractive to women at work?
7. How many women present themselves in sexually seductive ways to men at work?

8. How many men present themselves in sexually seductive ways to women at work?

Emotional Exhaustion (Iverson et al., 1998)

1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
2. I feel used up at the end of the workday.
3. I feel burned out from my work.