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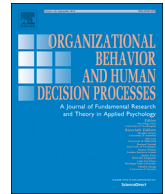
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The stress-relieving benefits of positively experienced social sexual behavior in the workplace

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ABSTRACT

The current research examines the understudied consequences of non-harassing social sexual behavior in the workplace. In a programmatic series of studies, we argue and test the proposition that being the recipient of enjoyed social sexual behavior can provide psychosocial resources (such as feeling powerful, socially connected, and physically attractive) that protect recipients from stress and its negative outcomes. In Study 1, we develop and validate a measure of non-harassing social sexual behavior that is conceptually and empirically distinct from sexual harassment and is positively correlated with daily resource accumulation. We also uncover two distinct forms of social sexual behavior: flirtation and sexual storytelling. In Study 2, we use time-lagged data to demonstrate that the frequency of receiving flirtation at work is more positively related to psychosocial resource accumulation to the extent that it is enjoyed, and the resulting resources predict lower levels of stress. Finally, in Study 3, we use multi-source data to demonstrate that enjoyed flirtation buffers the relationship between workplace injustice and the stress-related outcomes of job tension and insomnia.

“Working at Bazooms can be “a huge self-esteem boost” because Bazooms girls are getting what some consider to be positive attention in the form of flirting, flattery, and daily affirmation that they are indeed sexy, desirable women.”

Female waitress (Loe, 1996, p. 418)

“Sexual banter happens partly because of the high stress situations. In the operating room, it’s even more stressful...there’s teasing and joking and pinching and elbowing. It’s fun. That’s one reason people like being in that arena. That’s part of the camaraderie.”

Female urologist (Giuffre, 1997, p. 6)

In her seminal work on sexual behavior in the workplace, Gutek (1985) found that many employees experience social interactions that have sexual overtures or innuendos, the majority of which they interpret as benign, or even positive, experiences (see also Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990). If one were to scan the current literature on workplace sexual behavior, however, they would likely intuit that the opposite is true. Despite a handful of exceptions, including a small body of work on

workplace romance (e.g., Pierce, 1998; Pierce & Aquinis, 2009; Quinn, 1977), the vast majority of research in this domain has focused on the decidedly painful experience of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995). Such a concentrated focus on sexual harassment is not entirely surprising; it is an insidious form of mistreatment that “derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual’s sex” (Berdahl, 2007, p. 644), and is associated with a long list of detrimental personal and organizational consequences (McDonald, 2012; O’Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009). This research has been crucial to helping organizational leaders understand the importance of eradicating sexual harassment, and influencing the creation of laws against workplace sexual harassment.

This emphasis, however, inadvertently suggests that most or all sexual behavior at work is harassing and demeaning. In the current research, we are interested in exploring the consequences of workplace sexual behavior that is enjoyed. In doing so, we offer two important theoretical contributions. First, we map the conceptual space of non-harassing workplace sexual behavior. Though scholars have previously

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acknowledged that sexual behavior at work can be enjoyed (e.g., [Berdahl & Aquino, 2009](#); [Gutek et al., 1990](#)), there is still much to be learned regarding the dimensionality of this construct space and its demarcation from sexual harassment. Extending others' conceptualizations of *social sexual behavior* (SSB; [Aquino, Sheppard, Watkins, O'Reilly, & Smith, 2014](#)), we provide empirical evidence of two conceptually related but distinct forms of SSB, which we label flirtation and sexual storytelling. Our research indicates that each of these are distinct from sexual harassment and yet manifest in meaningfully different consequences.

Second, we investigate the potential stress-relieving qualities of SSB that is enjoyed by recipients. Previous qualitative accounts have colloquially referred to SSB as an 'ego-boost' ([Erickson, 2010](#); [Gutek, Nakamura, Gahart, Handschumacher, & Russell, 1980](#); [Lerum, 2004](#); [Loe, 1996](#)). We theorize that enjoyed SSB results in feelings of confidence, power, and a sense of belonging. Drawing from conservation of resources theory ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)), we propose that these benefits are psychosocial resources that reduce stress. We test our overarching theory using two approaches. In the first, we investigate the potential for enjoyed SSB to reduce stress via the accumulation of psychosocial resources. In the second, we investigate the potential for enjoyed SSB to buffer the stress-related consequences of a common workplace stressor: injustice.

Our research is especially timely given recent societal shifts in attitudes toward sexual behavior in the workplace. Undoubtedly, it is encouraging that organizational authorities are taking sexual harassment seriously and cracking down on harassers ([Gurchiek, 2018](#)). However, the emphasis on the dark side of sexual behavior can inadvertently send the message that all forms must be monitored, controlled, and punished ([Williams et al., 1999](#)), resulting in hypervigilant policies that unduly sanitize the workplace of pleasurable social interactions ([Schultz, 2003](#)). There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this is already happening. For example, insiders at Netflix claim that, in an attempt to prevent claims of sexual harassment, the company has instructed employees to refrain from looking at each other for more than five seconds ([Hooten, 2018](#)). In addition to disrupting normal interactions and imbuing them with anxiety, the current research suggests that policies such as these could deny some employees the stress-relieving benefits of being the recipient of enjoyed SSB. In our Discussion, we elaborate upon the theoretical contributions highlighted above and discuss the practical implications of our research in light of the current socio-political climate surrounding sexual behavior in the workplace. But first, we start by detailing our conceptualization of SSB.

1. Conceptualizing workplace social sexual behavior

For the purposes of the current research, SSB refers to social interactions between two or more employees that have sexual content or innuendo but that are not, by definition, perceived as demeaning or humiliating ([Aquino et al., 2014](#)). Examples include being complimented on one's physical appearance, casual touch, flirtatious eye contact, and sexual banter or jokes – all common behaviors in human courtship and social bonding rituals ([Morris, 1971](#)). Importantly, these behaviors are not always driven by romantic interest, and tend to be instinctive behaviors even among those in platonic opposite-sex relationships ([Abrahams, 1994](#); [Egland, Spitzberg, & Zormeier, 1996](#)). These behaviors can also occur between members of the same gender and of diverse sexual orientations. Montgomery (1989; referenced in [Keyton, 1993, p. 5](#)) observed that, "in general, these behaviors are prosocial, providing relational rewards through positive reinforcement." Across the qualitative literature describing scenes of flirting and sexual banter, these behaviors are described as playful and fun ([Abrahams, 1994](#); [Downey & Vitulli, 1987](#); [Giuffre & Williams, 1994](#); [Henningsen, 2004](#); [Henningsen, Braz, & Davies, 2008](#)).

The conceptual demarcation between SSB and sexual harassment is an important line to draw. Like SSB, sexual harassment includes

interactions between two or more people that contain sexual content. Unlike SSB, however, sexual harassment derogates, demeans, or humiliates a recipient on the basis of their gender ([Berdahl, 2007](#)), and taxes a recipient's resources ([Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997](#)). Sexual harassment is often motivated by harassers' desire to bolster or protect status ([Berdahl, 2007](#)). The definition of sexual harassment in the organizational sciences is informed by the legal definition, which requires sexual harassment to be sufficiently severe and persistent enough that it results in a hostile work environment that interferes with one's work ([Adler & Peirce, 1992](#)). Sexual harassment is also at times defined by applying both a third party (i.e., would a reasonable person recognize this act as offensive?) and subjective (i.e., did the specific recipient/bystander experience the act as offensive?) standard ([O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009](#)). With this in mind, there are two defining features that separate SSB from sexual harassment from the recipient's perspective. First, whereas sexual harassment by definition is experienced as derogating, threatening, or humiliating, SSB is not defined by a recipient's evaluation; SSB can be evaluated positively, neutrally, or negatively. Second, SSB represents sexual exchanges that are generally more benign than behaviors that are typically included in the category of sexual harassment. As a result, even when SSB is experienced negatively it should not reach the legal standard of resulting in a hostile work environment (see [Adler & Peirce, 1992](#)).

Whether SSB is experienced positively, negatively, or neutrally will depend on the individuals involved and the nature of their pre-existing relationship. For example, relative to men, women tend to interpret ambiguous sexual behavior as more offensive ([Gutek, 1985](#)), and view a wider range of SSB as offensive ([Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001](#)). Men also tend to enjoy SSB more than women ([Berdahl & Aquino, 2009](#)). Despite these general tendencies, both men and women do report having enjoyed these behaviors at work ([Berdahl & Aquino, 2009](#)). Beyond gender, these behaviors are likely to be more enjoyable when they occur between work peers, or in situations in which one party does not have organizational power over the other ([Gordon, Cohen, Grauer, & Rogelberg, 2005](#); [Lerum, 2004](#)). We expect that at work, most people are quite discerning in their engagement of this behavior, opting to initiate or participate in SSB with peers with whom they already have social relationships ([Keyton, 1993](#)).

Regardless of the individual and relational factors that influence how SSB is evaluated, the primary focus of our research question is to better understand a potential benefit of these behaviors when they are enjoyed: namely, the potential for these behaviors to alleviate stress as a result of their contribution to psychological resource accumulation. We now turn to our theory that enjoyed SSB contributes to an employee's stock of stress-relieving resources.

2. Positively experienced social sexual behavior as a source of psychosocial resources

Expanding from previous qualitative accounts of these behaviors being perceived as playful and fun, we argue that enjoyed SSB plays a functional role by providing employees with psychological and social benefits. We conceptualize these benefits as *psychosocial resources* – individuals' positive beliefs about themselves. Importantly, the most salient avenue through which people accumulate psychosocial resources is through positive interactions and relationships ([Cohen & Wills, 1985](#)). Several qualitative studies provide preliminary evidence to suggest that when enjoyed, SSB contributes to positive beliefs about the self. In narrative accounts of SSB, employees report that being flirted with and taking part in sexual banter fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion (e.g., [Dellinger & Williams, 2002](#); [Erickson, 2010](#); [Giuffre & Williams, 1994](#); [Lerum, 2004](#)). Women working at a feminist magazine were observed by [Dellinger and Williams \(2002\)](#) to frequently engage in conversations about their sex lives, likening their workplace to a "sisterhood" ([Dellinger & Williams, 2002, p. 251](#)). One editor stated that, "For the most part, conversations about our emotional and sexual

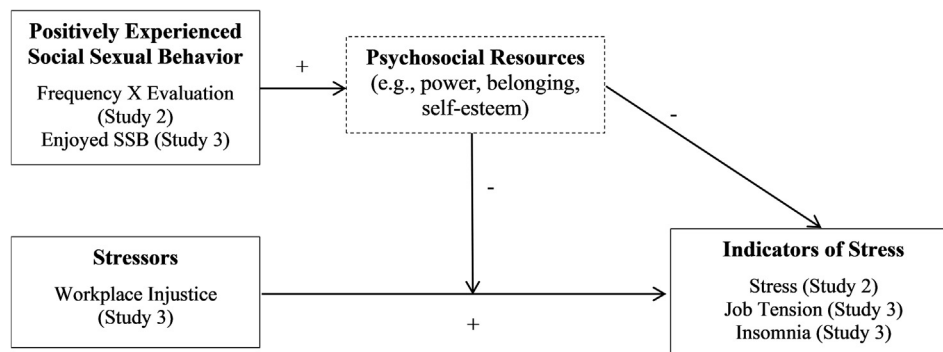


Fig. 1. Proposed foundational theory.

lives are wonderful and liberating and one of the best parts of being at *Womyn*. It is special" (p. 252). In a study of restaurant employees' flirtatious behavior, Erickson (2010) described SSB as a ritual of inclusion and noted that the employees interpreted both flirtation and sexual banter as signals of friendship. Similarly, Yount (1991, p. 400) found that gentle "playful" and "humorous" sexual teasing signaled to both men and women coal mine employees that they were part of the in-group.

Furthermore, being the target of SSB signals one's physical attractiveness, thereby producing feelings of confidence and power (e.g., Hakim, 2010; Loe, 1996). Qualitative accounts of SSB provide evidence to suggest that flirtation can elevate self-esteem. For example, from interviews of waitresses' experiences, Loe (1996) concluded that their enjoyment of sexual attention was the reason the restaurant frequently had its choice from hundreds of female applicants: "[It] can be really fun for a while. The girls eat it up..." (p. 418). Sexual attention can be used to accrue other resources, such as informal power (Watkins, Smith, & Aquino, 2013; Yount, 1991), or what Hakim (2010) refers to as *erotic capital*. In a service industry study, Lerum (2004) gleaned from interviews with employees that sexual banter and flirting at work allowed many to feel empowered and autonomous.

Each of the aforementioned consequences that we propose can stem from being the recipient of enjoyed SSB are associated with resources found on the Hobfoll (1998) list of resources. These include feelings of belonging, confidence, attractiveness, and a sense of social power (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). It is important to note that in many of the narrative accounts of enjoyed SSB, sexual harassment tended to co-occur (e.g., Dellinger & Williams, 2002; Lerum, 2004; Loe, 1996; Yount, 1991). For example, Loe (1996) found that while many of the servers she interviewed reported enjoying the flirtation they received from restaurant patrons, some spoke of aggressive interactions that fit the definition of sexual harassment. Similarly, Yount (1991) found that while sexual teasing helped recipients feel as though they were part of the in-group, more demeaning forms were used to ostracize. These accounts suggest that in the same contexts in which SSB occurs, sexual harassment can also occur. For the sake of our research question, we are most interested in the psychosocial benefits when a recipient does indeed report enjoying SSB. Our data also allow us to examine any potential resource loss that might occur when SSB is experienced negatively.

3. The stress-relieving benefits of social sexual behavior

We borrow from the conservation of resources perspective of stress (COR) to theorize about how enjoyed SSB has an ameliorating effect on stress (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998). According to COR, stress occurs when personal resources are lost or threatened, and is alleviated when resources are bolstered. Resources are important in mitigating stress via two pathways. First, the accumulation of resources encourages

psychological well-being and is directly associated with less stress (Hobfoll, 1989). While early theory development on COR focused primarily on understanding the detrimental consequences of resource loss and stress, later work has recognized the direct positive consequences of resource gains (e.g., Braunstein-Bercovitz, 2013; Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008). This perspective can explain why people with more resources experience less stress than those with fewer resources, regardless of the stressors they face (Thoits, 1995). In the context of our research, when individuals feel good about themselves via the psychosocial resources offered by enjoyed SSB, they are likely to feel more upbeat rather than distressed. Second, resources are hypothesized to buffer the negative effects of stressors. That is, psychosocial resources help people cope by influencing how they appraise and respond to stressors in a constructive way (Hobfoll, 1989). As such, one possible consequence of enjoyed SSB is that it can protect recipients from the negative consequences of stressors.

A COR perspective can explain the psychological mechanism underlying the aforementioned accounts describing SSB as a means of stress relief (Dougherty, 2001; Giuffre, 1997). For example, the second quote appearing in our introduction is from an unpublished case study of medical professionals (Giuffre, 1997), several of whom believed that sexual banter and flirtation were produced, in part, as attempts to have fun in the face of stressful events, such as the performance of a surgery. The stress-relieving elements of SSB in a healthcare setting were also uncovered in an interview study by Dougherty (2001), albeit more so for men than women.

4. The current research

Our theoretical model is presented in Fig. 1. To summarize, we propose that to the extent that SSB is enjoyed, it contributes to the recipient's pool of psychosocial resources that reduce stress and buffer the consequences of stressors. The current research consists of a programmatic series of studies intended to better understand the nature and consequences of SSB across a range of workplaces. In Study 1, we conducted an in-depth analysis to better understand SSB as a construct and, in so doing, developed and validated a measure. We also identified two distinct types of workplace SSB, flirtation and sexual storytelling, distinguished these from sexual harassment, and investigated their capacity to predict daily resource accumulation.

Next, in Studies 2 and 3, we tested our theoretical framework presented in Fig. 1 via two theoretically derived models: one in which we observed the stress-reducing consequences of enjoyed SSB via the accumulation of psychosocial resources (Study 2; moderated mediation model), and one in which we investigated the stress-buffering effects of enjoyed SSB in light of the workplace stressor of injustice (Study 3: moderation model). Our approach represents a *conceptual replication*, in which theory is tested using different empirical models and operationalizations of focal variables (Lynch, Bradlow, Huber, & Lehmann, 2015). A conceptual replication provides more robust support for a

foundational theory, compared to a direct replication, by assuaging the possibility that empirical support for a theory is due to methodological artifacts. In Study 2, we used time-lagged data to demonstrate that the frequency of receiving SSB was more positively related to resource accumulation to the extent that it was enjoyed by recipients, and the resulting resources predicted lower levels of stress. In Study 3, we used multi-source data to demonstrate that enjoyed SSB buffered the relationship between workplace injustice and two common indicators of stress: job tension and insomnia.

4.1. Study 1

While much of the research in our literature review relied on qualitative methods, there are a handful of studies that have used quantitative measures of sexual behavior at work. There are, however, a number of conceptual drawbacks with these existing measures, at least for the purposes of the current research. For example, Gutek et al. (1990) provided participants with a list of behaviors that were mixed in tone, such as “making complimentary sexual comments to another,” and, “making insulting sexual remarks to another”, thereby collapsing SSB into sexual harassment. Similarly, Berdahl and Aquino (2009) used two slightly different measures, each of which included explicitly sexual behaviors: “being touched on one’s face, butt or thigh (or other private part)” and, “observing a colleague expose themselves,” for example. The inclusion of these behaviors could explain why their participants did not generally enjoy sexual behavior at work.

Thus, the purpose of Study 1 was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual space of SSB and, in so doing, validate a measure. We followed best practices in scale development in order to properly establish the content validity, internal consistency, and nomological network of our scale (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 1983; Hinkin, 1995, 1998). We also sought in Study 1 to empirically distinguish our construct from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment has been identified as a workplace stressor (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007), so we assessed the associations between our measure, a measure of sexual harassment, and stress to provide further evidence of its discriminant validity. Finally, we used a daily diary study to test our foundational theoretical proposition that enjoyed SSB contributes to psychosocial resources.

4.1.1. Method

4.1.1.1. Participants. Data were comprised of four independent samples. The first two samples were used to conduct exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses on our scale items. The third sample was used to distinguish our measure from sexual harassment and demonstrate a differential relationship with stress. Finally, the fourth sample provided a rigorous test of our conceptualization of enjoyed SSB as providing psychosocial resources. The surveys used to collect data in Samples 1 to 3 were cross-sectional. In Sample 4, participants provided survey responses across five consecutive work days.

Sample 1 (exploratory factor analysis) was collected via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, a reliable online data collection platform (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). A total of 452 individuals completed the survey and, of those, 72 either missed at least one of two attention check questions or did not meet the inclusion criteria (i.e., currently employed). The final sample consisted of 380 employed participants (33 percent men; 74 percent ranged from 20 to 39 years old; 78 percent Caucasian; 61 percent had a Bachelor’s degree or higher).

Sample 2 (confirmatory factor analysis) was collected from two sources. The first source was undergraduate students at a university in Canada. Since many of the students in the potential participant pool were not employed and therefore were ineligible, we supplemented this data source by recruiting participants through Zoomerang, an online data collection platform. The entire Sample 2 was comprised of 393 participants who met the inclusion criteria (283 collected from Zoomerang; 40.5 percent men; 63.4 percent ranged from 20 to 39 years

old; 40 percent Caucasian; 41.8 percent had a Bachelor’s degree or higher).

Sample 3 (divergent validity) was collected via Mechanical Turk. A total of 386 individuals completed the survey. Of those, 38 participants missed at least one of two attention check questions or did not meet the inclusion criteria. Thus, the final sample was 348 (39.7% men; 77.3% identified as Caucasian), with an average age of 31.29 years ($SD = 11.17$ years).

Sample 4 (convergent validity) consisted of 233 full-time employees enrolled in part-time graduate programs in three large universities in the Philippines who completed five consecutive daily diary surveys. The sample was 60 percent female, with an average age of 31.74 years ($SD = 10.94$) and an average tenure of 5.94 years ($SD = 7.05$).

4.1.1.2. Procedure and materials

4.1.1.2.1. Social sexual behavior. We used a deductive approach to generating scale items (Hinkin, 1998). Guided by our conceptualization of SSB, one author developed an initial pool of 25 items. Recall that the definition of SSB is interactions with sexual content or innuendo that have the potential to be evaluated positively, neutrally, or negatively by recipients (Aquino et al., 2014). The majority of these initial 25 items were adapted from the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ, Fitzgerald et al., 1995). However, the wording of these items was revised so that they would not assume that the behavior in question was offensive. For example, an SEQ item *...made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities* was reworded to *...made complimentary remarks about a specific part of your body*. Our goal was to create a list of items that comprehensively covered the types of SSB we identified in previous narrative accounts of SSB. To assess content validity, two other members of the authorship team acted as subject matter experts to verify that the items fit the definition of SSB and captured the full potential range of SSB (Sireci, 1998). At this stage, all 25 items were retained for analyses.

All samples completed a measure of SSB (Samples 3 and 4 completed the final measure). In Samples 1 and 2, we assessed the frequency with which participants were recipients of these behaviors at work over the previous six months on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (More than ten times). In Sample 3, in addition to assessing frequency, we asked participants to report their evaluations of each item on a response format ranging from -2 (Highly negative) to $+2$ (Highly positive). For descriptive purposes, we also asked participants to indicate whether they experienced such behaviors from mostly men, mostly women, or both, and the primary source of each behavior they experienced (supervisor, coworker, subordinate, client/customer, or other). In Sample 4, we assessed only enjoyed SSB. Participants were asked to report the *daily* frequency with which they received enjoyed SSB, on a scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (More than 6 times). This helped reduce the amount of time it would take participants to complete the daily survey, which is important to reduce attrition.

4.1.1.2.2. Sexual harassment. Sample 3 completed the 16-item Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (Stark, Chernyshenko, Lancaster, Drasgow, & Fitzgerald, 2002). We used the same frequency and evaluation response formats used alongside our SSB measure for comparison purposes.

4.1.1.2.3. Stress. Sample 3 also completed 10 items from Saunders, Arata, and Kilpatrick (1990), a measure frequently used in sexual harassment research to measure discomfort from physical and mental symptoms of stress (e.g., Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman, & Drasgow, 1999; Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000). Example items include experiencing “trouble falling asleep”, “heart pounding or racing”, and “feeling hopeless about the future”. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (No discomfort) to 5 (Extreme discomfort).

4.1.1.2.4. Psychosocial resources. Sample 4 completed a daily measure of the extent to which they felt *insecure-confident*, *unattractive-attractive*, *powerless-powerful*, *excluded-included*, and *exclusion-belonging*, responding on 7-point bipolar scales. These items

were not tied to their experience of SSB; participants were simply asked to report the extent to which they felt this way *in the moment*. Our choice of psychosocial resources was driven by two criteria. First, we conducted an extensive review of the qualitative research that has exposed the potential psychosocial benefits of SSB. We sought to create a list of psychosocial resources that comprehensively captured what was detailed in this research (e.g., Dellinger & Williams, 2002; Dougherty, 2001; Erickson, 2010; Giuffre, 1997; Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Hakim, 2010; Lerum, 2004; Loe, 1996; Yount, 1991). Second, we cross-checked our list with the Hobfoll (1998) conceptualization of psychosocial resources to verify they fit the definition. Because the data were hierarchically structured, with daily questionnaires nested within participants, we conducted a multilevel exploratory factor analysis using MPlus 7.2 and confirmed that these resources loaded onto one factor.

4.1.1.3. Results

4.1.1.3.1. *Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of our SSB measure (Samples 1 and 2)*. We conducted factor analyses using the frequency measures of SSB because we wanted to assess the internal consistency and dimensionality of received SSB, and to produce an efficient yet comprehensive measure of SSB regardless of how it is evaluated by the recipient. We used Sample 1 to conduct an exploratory factor analysis. In order to obtain adequate variability for conducting factor analyses, we eliminated behaviors that very few participants reported as having occurred within the previous six months. Consequently, we retained only those behaviors that at least 20 percent of Sample 1 reported experiencing one or more times in the previous six months. Eleven items met this criterion. Because our data violated assumptions of multivariate normality, we used principal-axis factor extraction (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999). We required factor loadings of at least 0.40 and a difference of at least 0.20 between factor loadings in order to retain items (Ferguson & Cox, 1993; Hinkin, 1995).

Following guidelines detailed in Pedhauzer and Schmelkin (1991), we first assessed the factor structure with an oblique (direct oblimin) rotation. Based on the eigenvalues, a two factor structure emerged (the percentage of the variance explained was 44.75 and 16.63 respectively). However, the number of cross-loadings and weak correlation between the factors ($r = 0.013$) suggested that an orthogonal rotation would improve interpretability (cf. Thurstone, 1947). Pedhauzer and Schmelkin (1991) recommend a quartimax rotation orthogonal rotation when there is theoretical rationale to expect a general factor, thus we used a quartimax rotation (see also: Gorsuch, 1983; Visinescu & Evangelopoulos, 2014). The items and their loadings are presented in Table 1.¹

The pattern of results further supported the two-factor structure: Six items loaded on the first factor and five items loaded on the second factor. All the items that loaded on Factor 1 pertained to flirting, such as receiving compliments and provocative looks. We refer to this factor as ‘flirtation’. The items loading on Factor 2 pertained to sexual banter, storytelling, or jokes. We refer to this factor as ‘sexual storytelling’. Both factors indicated good internal consistency: Cronbach alphas were 0.85 and 0.86, respectively.

Next, following best practices (Hinkin, 1998), we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with AMOS 16 using Sample 2 to evaluate the fit of the two-factor model to the data and to further assess the appropriateness of the items associated with each factor. The sample covariance matrix of the reported frequency of each behavior was used as input for the CFA. Following Bollen’s (1989) recommendation, we examined several fit statistics: the chi-square test, normed-fit index (NFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative-fit

Table 1

Study 1 factor loadings for social sexual behavior items based on exploratory factor analysis (Sample 1).

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
1 Looked at you in a sexually provocative way	0.64	0.28
2 Told you that you were pretty, beautiful, or handsome	0.76	0.07
3 Shared a personal story about a sexual experience they had in the past	0.22	0.76
4 Made you feel that you were attractive or desirable	0.80	0.24
5 Complimented you on how nicely you were dressed	0.53	0.03
6 Made complimentary remarks about a specific part of your body	0.57	0.31
7 Engaged you in a discussion of sexual matters	0.17	0.85
8 Treated you as a confidant and someone they could talk to about their sexual problems	0.18	0.68
9 Flirted with you	0.71	0.31
10 Told you an erotic joke or story	0.21	0.69
11 Gossiped about your co-workers’ sexual activities	0.23	0.60

Note: The factor loadings of the items included in each subscale in Study 1 are bolded.

index (CFI), and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). The CFA indicated that the two-factor model fit the data well, χ^2 ($df = 43$) = 198.54, $p < 0.01$, GFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.10. Several of the fit statistics fell within the recommended ranges and all of the parameter estimates for the items were significant. However, inspection of the modification indices and standardized residuals indicated that fit could be improved by deleting two items that had loadings on multiple factors. Based on testing theory practice, we deleted these items and performed a CFA on the remaining nine items (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The fit statistics improved, χ^2 ($df = 26$) = 59.84, $p < 0.01$, GFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06. All the items comprising the two hypothesized subscales were unidimensional. We also compared the two-factor model to a model in which all items loaded onto a single factor. The fit statistics for the single-factor model indicated a poorer fit to the data, χ^2 ($df = 27$) = 150.93, $p < 0.01$, GFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.11. A chi-square difference test indicated that the two-factor model fit the data significantly better than the single-factor model, $\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta df = 1$) = 91.09, $p < 0.01$. We therefore concluded that the two-factor model was upheld by the results of the CFA in a new sample. The standardized parameter estimates for each item are shown in Table 2.

Hinkin (1998) recommends that scales be comprised of four to six items to strike a balance between establishing good internal consistency and efficiency/length. The final scales for both flirtation (5 items) and storytelling (4 items) met this criterion. Furthermore, the final scales exhibited acceptable internal consistency based on the Cronbach alphas: 0.87 for flirtation and 0.71 for sexual storytelling.

4.1.1.3.2. *Differentiating social sexual behavior from sexual harassment (Sample 3)*. We used Sample 3 to examine the relationships between the final 9-item SSB scale, sexual harassment, and stress. For descriptive purposes, we first assessed the frequency and evaluation of SSB by gender. Both men and women reported receiving equal amounts of flirtation ($M_{men} = 1.68$; $M_{women} = 1.80$; $M_{diff} = 0.12$, $p = 0.240$); however, men evaluated these behaviors more positively than women ($M_{men} = 0.33$; $M_{women} = 0.11$; $M_{diff} = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, men received flirtation more often from women than men (74.64 percent; versus 13.39 percent from both men and women equally, and 11.97 percent from mostly men) and women received flirtation more often from men than women (62.3 percent; versus 24.40 percent from both men and women equally, and 13.29 percent from mostly women). One observation to offer here is that these gender dynamics may be influenced by the sexual orientation of our sample, with the vast majority identifying as straight (89.6%; 3.7% identified as gay or lesbian; 6.6% identified as bisexual). Men received more sexual

¹ The pattern of results is similar, and the interpretation of the factor loadings the same, when a varimax rotation is applied.

Table 2
Study 1 standardized parameter estimates for social sexual behavior items from confirmatory factor analysis (Sample 2).

Item	Flirtation	Sexual storytelling
1 Looked at you in a sexually provocative way	0.80	
2 Told you that you were pretty, beautiful, or handsome	0.69	
3 Shared a personal story about a sexual experience they had in the past		0.79
4 Made you feel that you were attractive or desirable	0.83	
5 Made complimentary remarks about a specific part of your body	0.69	
6 Treated you as a confidant and someone they could talk to about their sexual problems		0.59
7 Flirted with you	0.80	
8 Told you an erotic joke or story		0.59
9 Gossiped about your co-workers' sexual activities		0.54

storytelling behaviors than women ($M_{men} = 1.77$; $M_{women} = 1.52$; $M_{diff} = 0.25$, $p = 0.009$) but there was no gender difference in the evaluation of these behaviors ($M_{men} = -0.04$; $M_{women} = -0.08$; $M_{diff} = 0.04$, $p = 0.409$).² In contrast to flirtation, sexual storytelling tended to be experienced more negatively than positively by both men and women. Also, in contrast to flirtation, sexual storytelling occurred more often from a same-gender source. The category of storyteller reported most frequently by men was “mostly men” (46.54 percent; versus 30.18 percent from both men and women equally, and 23.27 percent from mostly women) and for women it was “mostly women” (38.74 percent; versus 36.63 percent from both men and women equally, and 24.62 percent from mostly men). Thus, flirtation appears to be a cross-gender social phenomenon while sexual storytelling is same- or mixed-gender, at least within a predominantly heterosexual sample.

Furthermore, we assessed the frequency and evaluation of flirtation and sexual storytelling from supervisor versus non-supervisor sources. The vast majority of participants reported experiencing both flirtation (90.6%) and storytelling (90.2%) mostly from non-supervisor sources. Importantly, there were significant differences in participants' evaluations of both flirtation and storytelling when these behaviors came from a supervisor (Flirtation: $M = -0.35$; Storytelling: $M = -0.30$) versus non-supervisor (Flirtation: $M = 0.36$, $M_{diff} = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$; Storytelling: $M = -0.04$, $M_{diff} = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$). The pattern of results was consistent when broken down by participant gender. Our results suggest that SSB is more disliked when it is from someone with authority over the recipient.

We next compared the frequency and evaluation of flirtation and sexual storytelling to sexual harassment. The descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3. The frequency of flirtation ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$) and the frequency of sexual storytelling ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$) were both positively correlated with the frequency of sexual harassment. In addition, the evaluation of SSB and sexual harassment were positively correlated (for flirtation, $r = 0.15$, $p = 0.005$; for storytelling, $r = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). These correlations indicate that those who enjoyed SSB tended to evaluate sexual harassment behaviors as less bothersome than those who did not enjoy SSB. It is important to emphasize that these correlations do not imply that respondents enjoyed sexual harassment, as indicated by the negative mean scores of the evaluations of these behaviors in Table 3.

To compare the frequency and evaluation of each SSB dimension to sexual harassment, we conducted paired-sample *t*-tests. Both flirtation and sexual storytelling occurred more frequently than sexual harassment (both significantly different at $p < 0.01$) and were evaluated more favorably than sexual harassment (both significantly different at

² We conducted a *t*-test to investigate whether evaluations for flirtation and sexual storytelling for men and women were significantly different than the neutral mark, 0. The mean enjoyment of flirtation was significantly greater for both men ($p < 0.001$) and women ($p = 0.06$). Men's enjoyment of sexual storytelling behavior was not significantly different from neutral ($p = 0.401$), however women significantly disliked sexual storytelling behavior ($p = 0.020$).

$p < 0.01$). Both the frequencies of flirtation ($r = 0.13$, $p = 0.019$) and sexual storytelling ($r = 0.15$, $p = 0.007$) were positively correlated with stress, but these correlations were weaker than the relationship between sexual harassment and stress ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$). We applied the approach outlined by Meng, Rosenthal, and Rubin (1992) to assess the statistical difference between these correlations. Sexual harassment was more strongly correlated with stress compared to both flirtation ($Z = -2.93$, $p = 0.002$) and sexual storytelling ($Z = -2.35$, $p = 0.009$). Regressing stress on flirtation, sexual storytelling, and sexual harassment, rendered the relationship between the SSB subscales and stress non-significant. However, the relationship between sexual harassment and stress was not significantly reduced ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that the small, positive relationships between the SSB subscales and stress are due to their co-occurrence with sexual harassment, and supports our conceptualization that SSB is not a stressor in and of itself in the workplace.

4.1.1.3.3. Social sexual behavior and psychosocial resource accumulation (Sample 4). Sample 4 provided a test of our foundational proposition that enjoyed SSB results in psychosocial resource accumulation. We assessed daily enjoyed SSB and resource accumulation across five consecutive working days. Table 4 provides the Sample 4 means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations.

The data had a nested structure with five momentary observations of SSB and psychosocial resources, clustered within persons. We first conducted clustered confirmatory factor analyses to test whether the underlying structure of our SSB measure tapped the distinct forms we identified: flirtation and sexual storytelling. We used the Lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) and Lavaan Survey R (Oberski, 2014) packages to produce robust fit estimates. We first estimated a model with two latent variables. This model fit the data well, $\chi^2 = 69.60$, $df = 26$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.04, 95% CI: 0.03, 0.04, SRMR = 0.04, and all items loaded significantly on their intended factor ($p < 0.001$). The covariance between the two latent factors was 0.51 ($p < 0.001$). We also fitted a one-factor model in which all items loaded onto a single latent variable. The fit of this model was worse than that of the two-factor model, $\chi^2 = 145.84$, $df = 27$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.16, 95% CI: 0.14, 0.19, SRMR = 0.06. A model comparison test showed that the fit of the one-factor model was also significantly inferior to that of the two-factor model, $\chi^2(1) = 14.58$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, we confirmed that the distinct constructs of flirtation and sexual storytelling were measured by their respective scale items.

Next, we tested how daily variations in SSB were associated with daily psychosocial resources using hierarchical linear modeling. We centered SSB by subtracting the person-mean to which the observation belongs from each observation [i.e., centering within context (CWC) for each SSB subscale]. Flirtation was positively associated with psychosocial resource accumulation, $\gamma = 0.15$, $se = 0.05$, $df = 928.92$, $t = 2.86$, $p = 0.004$, but sexual storytelling was not, $\gamma = 0.03$, $se = 0.13$, $df = 928.93$, $t = 0.19$, $p = 0.95$.

4.1.1.4. Discussion. The results of Study 1 produced several insights. First, SSB is best characterized as two related but distinct types:

Table 3
Study 1 correlation matrix (Sample 3).

	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Flirtation Frequency	1.75	0.93	(0.90)						
2. Storytelling Frequency	1.62	0.85	0.51**	(0.84)					
3. Sexual Harassment Frequency	1.22	0.41	0.55**	0.48**	(0.91)				
4. Flirtation Evaluation	0.19	0.57	0.27**	0.29**	-0.05	(0.75)			
5. Storytelling Evaluation	-0.06	0.51	-0.03	0.10	-0.27**	0.36**	(0.74)		
6. Sexual Harassment Evaluation	-0.23	0.66	-0.28**	-0.17**	-0.44**	0.15**	0.35**	(0.93)	
7. Stress	2.15	0.78	0.13*	0.15**	0.27**	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	(0.85)

Note. N = 319–348 based on listwise deletion of missing variables. Numbers in parentheses represent Cronbach’s alphas.

* p < 0.05.
** p < 0.01.

Table 4
Study 1 correlation matrix (Sample 4).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Flirtation	0.67	0.83	(0.89)		
2. Sexual storytelling	0.62	0.83	0.91***	(0.88)	
3. Psychosocial resources	3.12	1.20	0.09***	0.08**	(0.92)

Note. N = 1165. Means and standard deviations are based on the uncentered scores. Correlations are within-person correlations. Numbers in parentheses represent Cronbach’s alphas.

*p < 0.05.
** p < 0.01.
*** p < 0.001.

flirtation and sexual storytelling. Though we did not hypothesize that these two dimensions would emerge in our data, previous research has at least informally alluded to these categories (see Aquino et al., 2014 for a review). Our research also indicates that each has unique properties. Overall, flirtation was more positively evaluated than sexual storytelling behavior, and appeared to be a cross-gender social phenomenon, whereas sexual storytelling was a same- or mixed-gender activity. Furthermore, in Sample 4, we found that flirtation was associated with the daily accumulation of psychosocial resources, whereas sexual storytelling was not. As such, Study 1 suggests that flirtation and sexual storytelling should be treated as distinct forms of SSB (Shaffer, DeGeest, & Li, 2016). We also found that both types of SSB are conceptually distinct from sexual harassment. We found that, when considered together, sexual harassment, but neither type of SSB, was associated with higher stress (Sample 3).

These results provide an empirical foundation with which to test our underlying theory – that SSB, when experienced positively, can contribute to the accumulation of psychosocial resources that in turn reduce stress. We provide more formal and precise tests of our theory in Studies 2 and 3. While we did not find that sexual storytelling was associated with an accumulation of psychosocial resources in Study 1, we continued to include sexual storytelling as a type of SSB in our subsequent studies to assess the reliability of this initial finding.

4.2. Study 2

In Study 2, we formally tested our theory by investigating the role of the interaction between the frequency and evaluation of SSB in predicting the accumulation of psychosocial resources and, via resources, stress. Specifically, we tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. *The frequency of SSB (flirtation and sexual storytelling) will be more positively associated with psychosocial resources when it is evaluated positively versus negatively.*

Hypothesis 2. *Frequent and positively evaluated SSB (flirtation and sexual storytelling) will predict less stress via the accumulation of psychosocial*

resources.

4.2.1. Method

4.2.1.1. Participants. We recruited participants through the online platform Prolific. Previous work has established that Prolific is a quality source of online data (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). Only participants who were employed, at least 18 years of age, and residing in the United States or Canada were eligible to participate. Data were collected on two occasions, with the predictor variables and mediator collected at Time 1 and the criterion variable collected at Time 2. Eight-hundred and twelve participants completed the Time 1 survey, however 37 were removed for inattentive responding. Of these Time 1 participants, 49 percent were male with an average age of 32.81 (SD = 9.86). Seventy-six percent of these participants were White (10 percent Asian, six percent Hispanic, 5 percent black, three percent other), and 84 percent identified as straight. Eighty-six percent were residing in the United States; the others in Canada.

One week later the Time 2 survey was launched, to which 715 participants responded for a response rate of 88 percent. Participants who completed both surveys, passed all attention checks, and provided an accurate ID with which to match their surveys (N = 658) were 49 percent male with an average age of 32.81 years (SD = 9.86). Seventy-six percent of these participants were White (10 percent Asian, six percent Hispanic, five percent Black, three percent other), and 85 percent identified as straight. Eighty-five percent were residing in the United States; the others in Canada. Participants who did not participate at Time 2 did not significantly differ from those who did in terms of gender (p = 0.941), age (p = 0.054), marital status (p = 0.940), or job tenure (p = 0.148).

4.2.1.2. Procedure and materials

4.2.1.2.1. Social sexual behavior. At Time 1, we measured SSB using the 9-item scale and response format developed and validated in Study 1. Participants indicated the frequency with which they received SSB during the previous six months, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (More than ten times), and then the extent to which they evaluated their experience of each of the items negatively versus positively, ranging from -2 (Highly negative) to +2 (Highly positive). At the end of each of the flirtation and sexual storytelling subscales, we asked participants to report the primary source of the behaviors (i.e., a peer, someone subordinate, someone superior, or a client/customer).

4.2.1.2.2. Psychosocial resources. At Time 1, we asked participants to reflect on their social interactions *in general* with their colleagues during the previous six months, and to indicate the extent to which these interactions made them feel *insecure-confident, unattractive-attractive, powerless-powerful, excluded-included, and exclusion-belonging*. These items were measured on 9-point bipolar scales.

4.2.1.2.3. Stress. At Time 2, we measured stress using the same 10 items used in Study 1 on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (No discomfort) to 5 (Extreme discomfort).

4.2.1.2.4. Controls. We controlled for participant gender due to different levels of enjoyment of flirtation reported in Study 1. Furthermore, because sexual behavior in any context is an inherently gendered phenomenon, with women being the target of more negative forms, we performed additional analyses in which we assessed whether gender had a moderating effect. Beyond gender, we controlled for participant age, marital status, and the frequency of receiving sexual harassment. We included age as a control variable because younger employees are likely to experience SSB more frequently and positively than older employees. Moreover, relationship status (single = 0, married or common-law = 1) could very well influence both the frequency and evaluation of SSB, with single employees expected to receive and enjoy this behavior more than married employees. Finally, we controlled for sexual harassment measured at Time 1 (Sexual Experiences Questionnaire; Fitzgerald et al., 1995), given that harassing and non-harassing SSB were shown to co-occur in Study 1. Controlling for harassment also allowed us to partial out any effects of a construct that is defined as being a negative experience. Finally, we controlled for the source of SSB (0 = non-supervisor, 1 = supervisor), given that Study 1 revealed less enjoyment when originating from someone in a superior position to the recipient.

4.2.1.3. Results. Descriptive analyses were initially performed to assess the reliability of some of our findings in Study 1. As in Study 1, SSB was largely received from non-supervisor sources. For flirtation, 60 percent originated from peers, 25 percent originated from clients/customers, eight percent originated from a supervisor, and seven percent originated from someone subordinate to the target. For sexual storytelling, 76 percent originated from peers, nine percent originated from clients/customers, eight percent originated from someone subordinate to the target, and seven percent originated from a supervisor. Again, as in Study 1, there were differences in participants' evaluations of both flirtation and storytelling when these behaviors came from a supervisor (Flirtation: $M = 0.49$; Storytelling: $M = -0.24$) versus non-supervisor (Flirtation: $M = 0.60$, $M_{diff} = 0.11$, $p = 0.564$; Storytelling: $M = 0.09$, $M_{diff} = 0.33$, $p = 0.027$), such that experiences were less positive when SSB originated from a supervisor source, though the contrast for flirtation did not reach statistical significance in this sample. In terms of gender differences in the frequency and evaluation of SSB, men and women did not differ significantly in the frequency of flirtation ($M_{men} = 1.90$; $M_{women} = 2.05$; $M_{diff} = 0.15$, $p = 0.071$), however, while both men and women on average evaluated these behaviors positively, men had more positive evaluations than women ($M_{men} = 0.82$; $M_{women} = 0.24$; $M_{diff} = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$). Men and women did not significantly differ in the frequency of received sexual storytelling ($M_{men} = 1.98$; $M_{women} = 1.92$; $M_{diff} = 0.06$, $p = 0.400$), but men evaluated sexual storytelling more positively than women ($M_{men} = 0.14$; $M_{women} = -0.05$; $M_{diff} = 0.19$, $p = 0.016$).

Study 2 means, standard deviations, and correlations for our primary variables of interest are provided in Table 5. Note that sample sizes for Study 2 tables are variable given that participants who experienced no SSB (either flirtation, sexual storytelling, or both) did not have corresponding evaluation scores and therefore were excluded from the corresponding analyses.

We used hierarchical regression to consider the main and interactive effects of the frequency and evaluation of SSB on psychosocial resources. In Step 1, we entered our controls, in Step 2 we entered flirtation frequency, flirtation evaluation, sexual storytelling frequency, and sexual storytelling evaluation. In Step 3, we entered both two-way interactions. Predictor variables were mean centered. Table 6 displays these results.

The interaction between flirtation frequency and evaluation predicted resource accumulation, but the interaction between sexual storytelling frequency and evaluation did not. The nature of the significant interaction was such that flirtation frequency positively

predicted psychosocial resources at high and mean levels of enjoyment, but not at low levels of enjoyment (At +1SD: $\beta = 0.54$, $t = 5.59$, $p < 0.001$; At mean: $\beta = 0.32$, $t = 3.81$, $p < 0.001$; At -1SD: $\beta = 0.10$, $t = 0.95$, $p = 0.343$). This interaction is depicted in Fig. 2.

Thus, we found partial support for Hypothesis 1; the frequency of flirtation, but not sexual storytelling, was more positively and significantly related to psychosocial resources at higher levels of enjoyment. Furthermore, the results suggested that even at low (-1SD) levels of enjoyment, the frequency of flirtation did not predict fewer psychosocial resources. We applied the Johnson-Neyman technique to determine if there was a level of enjoyment at which the relationship between flirtation frequency and psychosocial resources was significantly negative. This analysis revealed that even at the lowest level of enjoyment (-2.00), there was a negative but non-significant relationship between the frequency of flirtation and psychosocial resources ($t = -1.47$, $p = 0.143$). We return to this pattern of results in our Discussion of Study 2.

We next used the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012), Model 8 with 5000 bootstrapped samples, to test whether flirtation frequency and evaluation interacted to predict lower stress via the accumulation of psychosocial resources. Table 7 displays the results of this analysis.

The overall models were significant when predicting resources, $F(10, 354) = 11.14$, $p < 0.001$, and stress, $F(11, 353) = 11.00$, $p < 0.001$. The interaction between flirtation frequency and evaluation predicting psychosocial resources was significant, $b = 0.20$, $t = 2.87$, $p = 0.002$ ($R^2\Delta$ for the interaction = 0.03, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 predicted that frequent and enjoyed SSB is negatively associated with stress via the accumulation of psychosocial resources. Psychosocial resources predicted less stress, $b = -0.10$, $t = -3.21$, $p = 0.003$, and the index of moderated mediation was significant, $b = -0.02$, 95% CI: -0.05 , -0.004 . As such, we found support for Hypothesis 2 for flirtation.

Two follow-up analyses using the PROCESS macro were conducted to test whether participant gender moderated the flirtation frequency by evaluation interaction on psychosocial resources (Model 11), or the negative relationship between psychosocial resources and stress (i.e., second-stage moderation; Model 22). In Model 11, the three-way interaction between flirtation frequency, evaluation, and gender was not significant, $b = 0.09$, $t = 0.64$, $p = 0.523$, and the two-way interaction between flirtation frequency and evaluation remained significant, $b = 0.23$, $t = 2.79$, $p = 0.006$. Gender also did not moderate the pathway between resources and stress, $b = -0.04$, $t = -0.77$, $p = 0.444$, and the interaction between flirtation frequency and evaluation on resources remained significant in this model, $b = 0.23$, $t = 3.23$, $p = 0.001$. Overall, these results suggest that regardless of recipient gender, enjoyed flirtation was associated with enhanced psychosocial resources, which in turn predicted less stress.

4.2.1.4. Discussion. Consistent with our predictions, the frequency of flirtation was more strongly positively associated with psychosocial resources when enjoyment was high versus low, and psychosocial resources, in turn, predicted lower levels of stress. Two nuanced findings emerged in Study 2. First, we found that even when participants reported disliking flirtation, it did not detract from psychosocial resources. This finding supports our earlier conceptualization that SSB is a fairly benign form of sexual behavior. The second nuanced finding is that the interaction between frequency and evaluation for sexual storytelling was not significant. This finding is consistent with the overall pattern of results we found in Study 1, and suggests that sexual storytelling does not offer the same benefits as flirtation. In Study 3, we examined whether enjoyed SSB weakens the relationship between a known organizational stressor, workplace injustice, and the stress-related outcomes of job tension and insomnia.

Table 5
Study 2 correlation matrix.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	0.51	0.53												
2. Age	32.81	9.86	-0.13*											
3. Married	0.66	0.47	-0.07	0.07										
4. Sexual harassment	1.16	0.35	-0.08*	-0.04	-0.05	(0.91)								
5. Flirtation source	0.08	0.27	-0.05	-0.07	-0.06	0.08								
6. Storytelling source	0.08	0.26	-0.05	-0.07	-0.02	-0.001	0.33**							
7. Flirtation frequency	1.65	0.79	-0.07	-0.08*	-0.08*	0.54**	0.01	-0.01	(0.87)					
8. Flirtation evaluation	0.58	0.96	0.26**	-0.05	-0.02	-0.29**	-0.03	-0.03	-0.13**	(0.90)				
9. Storytelling frequency	1.62	0.74	-0.09*	-0.06	-0.06	0.42**	-0.03	-0.07	0.49**	-0.01	(0.78)			
10. Storytelling evaluation	0.08	0.86	0.13**	-0.10*	-0.06	-0.25**	-0.04	-0.10*	-0.06	0.37**	0.05	(0.77)		
11. Psychosocial resources	5.79	1.38	0.09*	0.002	-0.01	-0.10**	-0.08*	-0.10*	0.16**	0.39**	0.07	0.33**	(0.88)	
12. Stress	1.98	0.70	-0.09*	-0.11**	-0.08*	0.26**	0.05	0.04	0.15**	-0.18**	0.17**	-0.05	-0.14**	(0.86)

Note. N = 442–775 based on pairwise deletion of missing variables.

Gender coded such that 0 = women, 1 = men. Marital status coded such that married or common-law = 1, other = 0. Flirtation and Storytelling source coded such that 0 = non-superior, 1 = superior. Numbers in parentheses represent Cronbach’s alphas.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

4.3. Study 3

Having established that non-harassing SSB is associated with resource accumulation, which predicts less stress, in Study 3 we examined the buffering effects of enjoyed SSB in the presence of a common workplace stressor: workplace injustice from one’s supervisor. We chose injustice as our operationalization of a workplace stressor in Study 3 for two reasons. First, some stress scholars have argued that resources offer the strongest buffering effects when they match the demands associated with a particular stressor (e.g., [Cutrona & Russell, 1990](#); [De Jonge & Dormann, 2006](#); [Thoits, 1995](#)). Just as instrumental resources tend to be considered pivotal in alleviating work-related pressures ([Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001](#)), resources from interpersonal interactions are often considered well-suited to alleviating social stressors ([Thoits, 1995](#)). While the matching argument is debated in the stress literature, given that we are providing a foundational test of our theory regarding the buffering potential of enjoyed SSB, it seemed appropriate to test our theory in the context of a well-documented interpersonal stressor in organizational contexts. Second, injustice is a pervasive stressor that predicts diagnosed illnesses to a greater extent than all other identified work and life stressors, except for having no health insurance, and is trumped only by work-family conflict and unemployment in predicting mental health among the stressors studied

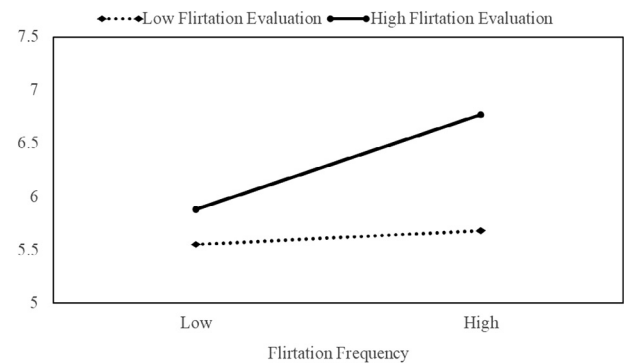


Fig. 2. Study 2 interactive effect between flirtation frequency and evaluation in predicting psychosocial resources.

by [Goh, Pfeffer, and Zenios \(2016\)](#). As such, ours is a conservative test of our theory. If enjoyed SSB can mitigate the effects of such a significant stressor, it can be reasonably inferred that it can also buffer the effects of milder stressors.

We selected our criterion variables because it is established that injustice reliably predicts higher levels of job tension and insomnia

Table 6
Study 2 interactive effects between SSB frequency and evaluation on psychosocial resources.

	Step 1 $R^2 = 0.07$ $F(6, 411) = 4.91^{***}$	Step 2 $R^2 = 0.24$ $R^2\Delta = 0.17^{***}$ $F(10, 407) = 12.48^{***}$	Step 3 $R^2 = 0.26$ $R^2\Delta = 0.03^{***}$ $F(12, 405) = 12.05^{***}$
Marital status	-0.02 (-0.44)	0.02 (0.44)	0.02 (0.44)
Age	-0.09 (-1.79)	-0.05 (-1.02)	-0.05 (-1.03)
Sexual harassment	-0.16 (-3.36)**	-0.12 (-2.09)*	-0.05 (-0.77)
Flirtation source	-0.03 (-0.50)	-0.02 (-0.50)	-0.01 (-0.25)
Storytelling source	-0.12 (-2.37)*	-0.09 (-1.87)	-0.08 (-1.84)
Gender	0.12 (2.54)*	0.06 (1.28)	0.05 (1.09)
Flirtation frequency (FF)		0.23 (4.15)**	0.21 (3.84)**
Storytelling frequency (SF)		-0.09 (-1.71)	-0.09 (-1.79)
Flirtation evaluation (FE)		0.28 (5.52)**	0.23 (4.34)**
Storytelling evaluation (SE)		0.19 (3.76)**	0.17 (3.37)**
FF × FE			0.17 (3.45)**
SF × SE			0.06 (1.13)

Note. N = 418 based on listwise deletion of missing variables.

Table presents standardized β coefficients and t values within brackets.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 7
Study 2 the effects of flirtation on stress via psychosocial resources.

Predicting psychosocial resources	β (t)
Gender	0.13 (1.09)
Age	-0.01 (-0.86)
Relationship status	0.09 (0.71)
Sexual harassment	-0.11 (-0.58)
Sexual storytelling frequency	-0.07 (-0.69)
Sexual storytelling evaluation	0.36 (4.43)***
Flirtation source	-0.08 (-0.32)
Flirtation frequency	0.31 (3.21)**
Flirtation evaluation	0.36 (4.50)***
Flirtation frequency X evaluation	0.20 (2.87)**
Predicting stress	β (t)
Gender	-0.12 (-1.72)
Age	-0.01 (-2.39)*
Relationship status	-0.07 (-0.99)
Sexual harassment	0.43 (3.90)***
Sexual storytelling frequency	0.09 (1.79)
Sexual storytelling evaluation	0.04 (0.85)
Flirtation source	-0.04 (-0.31)
Psychosocial resources	-0.10 (-3.21)**
Flirtation frequency	-0.06 (-1.14)
Flirtation evaluation	-0.06 (-1.27)
Flirtation frequency X evaluation	0.05 (1.34)
Index of moderated mediation	-0.05, -0.005

Note. $N = 365$ based on listwise deletion of missing variables.

Table presents β coefficients and t-values within brackets. Gender coded such that 0 = female, 1 = male.

[†] $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

(Greenberg, 2006). Our selection was also driven by theory outlining reactions to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sterling & Eyer, 1988), including physiological arousal and sympathetic nervous system activation (LeBlanc et al., 2009), which produce notable tension and difficulty initiating and maintaining sleep (i.e., insomnia) (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). The allostatic load model of stress (Sterling & Eyer, 1988) categorizes tension and sleep disturbance, alongside hormonal changes, as primary processes that precede a cascade of secondary and tertiary processes, such as cardiovascular disease, depression, and death. Our dependent variables were also ones that were more easily completed on a focal individual's behalf by a spouse and colleague, relative to scales directly assessing physiological (e.g., heart racing) or hormonal responses. We tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. *At higher frequencies of enjoyed SSB (flirtation and sexual storytelling), the positive relationship between workplace injustice and job tension will be weakened.*

Hypothesis 4. *At higher frequencies of enjoyed SSB (flirtation and sexual storytelling), the positive relationship between workplace injustice and insomnia will be weakened.*

4.3.1. Method

4.3.1.1. Participants. Participants were full-time employees enrolled in a part-time MBA program at a large university in the Philippines. We distributed 262 self-report surveys at Time 1, and received 217 completed surveys for an 83 percent response rate. At Time 2, two weeks after Time 1, we contacted those who participated in the initial survey and requested that they pass along a survey to their spouse and another survey to a coworker who was a part of their immediate work group. We received 152 coworker surveys and 143 spouse surveys. After removing surveys with missing data, we had a total of 136 employee-spouse-coworker triads. Two research assistants randomly

contacted 10 percent of the coworkers and spouses who completed the surveys to ensure the integrity of the data. All coworkers and spouses provided information supporting the accuracy of the data.

The demographic breakdown of the participants was as follows: 49 percent were men, their average age was 34.63 years, and 99 percent had been working in their respective organizations for at least one to five years. A large majority of our sample identified as straight (96.3%, 3.7% bisexual). Participants worked in a variety of industries, the four most common included: general management (17%), human resources (17%), accounting and finance (15%), and marketing and sales (15%). Among the coworkers surveyed, 39 percent were men and 93 percent had been working in their organization for at least one to five years. As for the spouses, 51 percent were men and the average age was 34.38 years.

4.3.1.2. Procedure and materials

4.3.1.2.1. Social sexual behavior. Given the constraints imposed by the participating institution, we had to truncate our measures. For this reason, we assessed flirtation using four items with the highest factor loadings and sexual storytelling with three items with the highest factor loadings from our validation study. To reduce the burden of participating, we asked participants to report the frequency of *enjoyed* SSB they received at work in the past six months, with response options ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (More than ten times). In order to assess whether the shortened measures were equivalent to the full measures, we collected data from an independent sample of 120 full-time workers. The correlations between the shortened and full scales were highly significant for both flirtation ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$) and sexual storytelling ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$).

4.3.1.2.2. Workplace injustice. We measured three dimensions of workplace injustice using the 15-item scale developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). Sample interactional justice items include: *My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect*, and *My supervisor answers questions truthfully* (both reverse-coded). Sample items used to measure distributive and procedural injustice, respectively, are: *My work schedule is fair*, and *Job decisions are made by my supervisor in an unbiased manner* (both reverse-coded). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Though the multi-factor model of justice has received considerable attention in the literature, there has been a shift toward a monistic conceptualization of 'overall justice' (e.g., Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001). Proponents of this view have noted that each of the dimensions of justice tend to be highly correlated with one another, are impacted by similar factors, and have similar nomological networks (Colquitt & Shaw, 2005; Liao, 2007; Lind, 2001). Accordingly, Colquitt and Rodell (2015) suggested that when researchers do not hypothesize different predictors or outcomes for each type of justice in the context of their theory, they need not operationalize the justice dimensions separately. Given that in our research we conceptualize injustice broadly as a stressor (see Colquitt, 2012), and do not predict different consequences, we combined the three dimensions of justice into a single measure for the sake of parsimony and interpretability.

4.3.1.2.3. Coworker-rated job tension. We used a 3-item measure to assess coworker-rated job tension (Hochwarter et al., 2007). The items were: *"This person's job tends to directly affect his/her health"*, *"This person works under a great deal of tension"*, and *"This person feels fidgety or nervous as a result of his/her job"*. Coworkers responded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal).

4.3.1.2.4. Spouse-rated insomnia. We measured spouse-rated insomnia using a 3-item scale developed by Jenkins, Stanton, Niemcryk, and Rose (1988). This scale includes the following items: *"My spouse finds it difficult falling asleep"*, *"My spouse wakes up several times per night"*, and *"My spouse finds it difficult staying asleep"*. The response format ranged from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal).

4.3.1.2.5. Controls. We controlled for participant gender and age.

Table 8
Study 3 correlation matrix.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	0.49	0.50								
2. Age	34.63	7.74	0.12							
3. Workplace injustice	4.52	0.75	0.07	0.14	(0.93)					
4. Flirtation	2.19	1.06	0.09	-0.11	0.14	(0.90)				
5. Sexual storytelling	1.96	1.01	0.18*	-0.16	-0.29**	0.52**	(0.90)			
6. Sexual harassment	0.21	0.40	-0.22**	-0.27**	-0.01	0.03	0.05	(0.93)		
7. Coworker-rated job tension	2.20	0.91	0.04	0.25**	-0.51**	-0.26**	-0.29**	0.05	(0.78)	
8. Spouse-rated insomnia	1.80	0.83	-0.04	0.01	0.37**	-0.20*	-0.27**	0.19*	0.58**	(0.86)

Note. N = 136.

Gender coded such that 0 = women, 1 = men. Numbers in parentheses represent Cronbach's alphas.

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.01.

We also controlled for the frequency of sexual harassment in the previous six months (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1995). The response format was 0 (Never) to 4 (Many times). In supplemental analyses, we explored the moderating role of participant gender.

4.3.1.3. Results. Study 3 means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 8. Predictor variables were mean centered.

We used hierarchical regression analyses. In Step 1 of the regression, we entered the control variables. In Step 2, we entered flirtation and sexual storytelling, as well as perceived injustice. In Step 3, we entered the flirtation × injustice, and sexual storytelling × injustice interactions.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that enjoyed SSB would moderate the relationship between workplace injustice and job tension. Table 9 shows that workplace injustice interacted with flirtation at a level that approached traditional levels of significance (p = 0.06), but not with sexual storytelling, to predict job tension. Given that the interaction between workplace injustice and flirtation was significant at p = 0.025 without control variables [R² = 0.32, R²Δ = 0.03, F(5, 130) = 12.38, p < 0.001], and at p = 0.023 with only sexual harassment as a control [R² = 0.33, R²Δ = 0.03, F(6, 129) = 10.41, p < 0.001], we explored this interaction further. We extracted information from the regression equation to plot the relationship between workplace injustice and job tension at low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) levels of flirtation. Fig. 3 shows that at low levels of flirtation, there was a strong positive association between workplace injustice and coworker-rated job tension (b = 0.62, 95% CI: 0.38, 0.85). In contrast, at high levels of flirtation, the relationship between workplace injustice and coworker-rated job tension was much weaker (b = 0.25, 95% CI: 0.001, 0.50). As such, we found

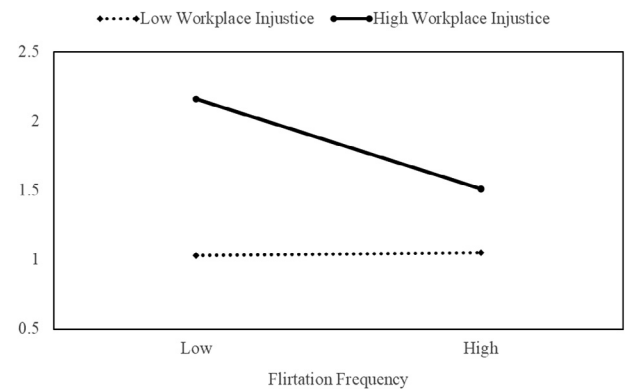


Fig. 3. Study 3 interactive effect between workplace injustice and flirtation in predicting co-worker rated job tension.

partial support for Hypothesis 3.

We next considered insomnia as the criterion variable. Hypothesis 4 predicted that enjoyed SSB would moderate the relationship between workplace injustice and insomnia. Table 10 shows the results of this analysis. Workplace injustice interacted significantly with flirtation, but not sexual storytelling, to predict insomnia. Fig. 4 shows that at low levels of flirtation, there was a positive association between workplace injustice and spouse-rated insomnia (b = 0.54, 95% CI: 0.29, 0.79). In contrast, at high levels of flirtation, the relationship between workplace injustice and spouse-rated insomnia was not significant (b = -0.02, 95% CI: -0.28, 0.25). As such, we found partial support for Hypothesis 4; enjoyed flirtation buffered the relationship between workplace

Table 9
Study 3 interactive effects between workplace injustice and social sexual behavior in predicting co-worker rated job tension.

	Step 1 R ² = 0.08* F(3, 131) = 3.63*	Step 2 R ² = 0.33 R ² Δ = 0.25** F(6, 128) = 10.58***	Step 3 R ² = 0.35 R ² Δ = 0.02 F(8, 126) = 8.60***
Gender	0.04 (0.41)	0.04 (0.51)	0.05 (0.59)
Age	0.28 (3.25)**	0.19 (2.43)*	0.17 (2.16)*
Sexual harassment	0.12 (1.34)	0.11 (1.46)	0.11 (1.43)
Flirtation		-0.15 (-1.74)	-0.17 (-1.99)*
Sexual storytelling		-0.07 (-0.75)	-0.04 (-0.45)
Injustice		0.43 (5.64)**	0.43 (5.70)**
Injustice × flirtation			-0.17 (-1.94)†
Injustice × storytelling			0.14 (1.53)

Note. N = 136.

Table presents standardized β coefficients and t values within brackets. Gender coded such that 0 = female, 1 = male.

† = 0.06.

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.01.

*** p < .001.

Table 10
Study 3 interactive effects between workplace injustice and social sexual behavior in predicting spouse-rated insomnia.

	Step 1 R ² = 0.04 F(3, 130) = 1.83	Step 2 R ² = 0.21 R ² Δ = 0.17** F(6, 127) = 5.55***	Step 3 R ² = 0.27 R ² Δ = 0.06** F(8, 125) = 5.82***
Gender	-0.01 (-0.06)	0.02 (0.18)	0.00 (0.02)
Age	0.07 (0.79)	-0.01 (-0.17)	-0.08 (-0.98)
Sexual harassment	0.19 (2.13)*	0.19 (2.28)*	0.22 (2.61)**
Flirtation		-0.08 (-0.84)	-0.11 (-1.23)
Sexual storytelling		-0.15 (-1.50)	-0.20 (-2.00)*
Injustice		0.30 (3.56)**	0.27 (3.20)**
Injustice × flirtation			-0.27 (-2.97)**
Injustice × storytelling			-0.01 (-0.13)

Note. N = 136.

Table presents standardized β coefficients and t values within brackets. Gender coded such that 0 = female, 1 = male.

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.01.

*** p < .001.

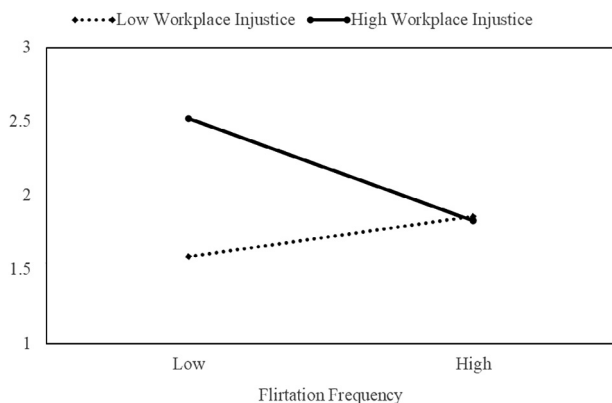


Fig. 4. Study 3 interactive effect between workplace injustice and flirtation in predicting spouse-rated insomnia.

injustice and insomnia but enjoyed sexual storytelling did not.

We also examined whether there were three-way interactions involving organizational injustice, each type of social sexual behavior, and participant gender. Results suggested that the three-way interactions were not significant in predicting co-worker-reported tension (three-way interaction with storytelling $b = -0.38, p = 0.18$; three-way interaction with flirtation $b = -0.09, p = 0.67$) and spouse-reported insomnia (three-way interaction with storytelling $b = -0.14, p = 0.61$; three-way interaction with flirtation $b = 0.21, p = 0.32$).

4.3.1.4. Discussion. Study 3 revealed that enjoyed flirtation weakened the relationships between workplace injustice, insomnia, and job tension, which provided support for our assertion that enjoyed SSB can protect recipients from the negative consequences of stress. Once again, sexual storytelling did not offer similar benefits. We return to this in the General Discussion.

5. General discussion

Narrative accounts have suggested that workplace interactions with sexual content can at times be received positively (Erickson, 2010; Lerum, 2004; Loe, 1996), but we know a great deal less about non-harassing forms of SSB compared to sexual harassment. In the current work, we began to address this gap by proposing and finding support for the notion that certain forms of enjoyed SSB predict the accumulation of psychosocial resources that protect against stress. In doing so, we make several important contributions to the literature on SSB. We highlight future research directions throughout our discussion.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

The first notable contribution is that our work is the first to formally establish flirtation and sexual storytelling as two conceptually similar but meaningfully distinct types of SSB. Our work confirms that both types fit the definition of SSB in that they both represent social interactions with sexual connotations or content, and can be received positively, neutrally, or negatively by recipients. Both types of SSB are also distinct from sexual harassment, as they are both generally interpreted as less negative and more enjoyable than sexual harassment. However, our research also reveals important descriptive differences between the two. While flirtation appears to skew towards being a cross-gender phenomenon, sexual storytelling occurs more frequently between individuals of the same gender, at least within a predominantly heterosexual sample. Our research offers useful guidance to scholars interested in studying SSB by providing a construct valid tool to measure these behaviors, and highlighting that flirtation and sexual storytelling should be considered separately when studying SSB.

Second, while narrative accounts of SSB have suggested that workplace interactions with sexual content or connotations can have stress-relieving properties (Dougherty, 2001; Giuffre, 1997), no prior research has identified and tested a specific psychological mechanism. We identified psychosocial resources as a mechanism and applied COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to document how the resources derived through SSB can reduce stress (Study 2) and buffer the impact of a common stressor (i.e., workplace injustice; Study 3). Our research again revealed important differences between flirtation and sexual storytelling in terms of their relationships with psychosocial resources and stress-related outcomes. Enjoyed flirtation was related to the accumulation of psychosocial resources and buffered the effects of workplace injustice, whereas sexual storytelling did not.

Our data cannot directly explain these discrepancies between flirtation and sexual storytelling, but one potential explanation lies in the distinction between direct and ambient behavior. Within the sexual harassment literature, a distinction is made between *direct* behaviors that are directed towards a specific target, and *ambient* behaviors, which do not have a specific target and are available to potentially all individuals within a social environment (e.g., Raver & Gelfand, 2005). We suspect that direct positive attention (i.e., flirtation) produces more robust psychosocial resources compared to ambient SSB. As a result, while highly enjoyed sexual storytelling behavior has the potential to contribute to psychosocial resources, these resources are likely less potent than the ones accumulated through flirtation. We encourage scholars to expand upon our theory here, or test alternative ideas, to offer explanations for this finding.

Our research also contributes to a growing body of literature on

positive relationships at work (Heaphy et al., 2018) by considering another avenue through which employees derive benefits from social interactions with colleagues. Prior research has shown that high-quality workplace relationships go beyond just instrumental benefits, offering employees friendship, personal growth, and opportunities to help others (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016). These benefits can result in heightened job and life satisfaction, as well as enhanced meaning (Colbert et al., 2016). Enjoyed SSB could be a feature of many high-quality workplace relationships, one that allows employees to feel admired and cared for by select colleagues. The newly-developed concept of a ‘work spouse’ is indeed suggestive of this (McBride & Bergen, 2015). Future research should explore how SSB both emerges from and contributes to high-quality relationships in the workplace.

5.2. Practical implications

In addition to offering theoretical contributions, our research has practical implications. First and foremost, it communicates to organizational authorities the imperative of being discerning and reasonable when creating policies designed to regulate sexual behavior, so as not to unnecessarily police otherwise enjoyable and psychologically beneficial social interactions among employees. Our research further underscores previous qualitative accounts of SSB as a means of fortifying and maintaining rapport amongst colleagues, and extends this research to provide evidence that being the recipient of enjoyed flirtation has stress-relieving consequences. Policies that eliminate all forms of sexual behavior, including behaviors that are non-harassing, deny employees these pleasurable experiences.

One might argue that zero-tolerance policies towards *all* forms of sexual behavior at work are necessary because the costs of sexual harassment outweigh the potential benefits documented in our research. However, as some scholars anticipated (Williams et al., 1999; Schultz, 2003), there is already evidence to suggest that the current climate towards sexual behavior has spawned rigid organizational policies that could instill uncertainty and fear into otherwise natural and pleasant interactions between employees, and unduly restrict interactions that offer opportunities for positive affirmation at work. In addition to the aforementioned Netflix example, in the wake of allegations against Matt Lauer, NBC created strict socializing policies for its employees, including a ban on sharing cabs and providing a specific set of guidelines for giving hugs (Smith, 2017). Considering that hugs are far more likely to produce positive mood boosts (Murphy, Janicki-Deverts, & Cohen, 2018) than claims of sexual harassment, organizations creating such repressive policies run the risk of eliminating forms of positive employee interactions that, for many people, make a mundane workday bearable. Moreover, policies such as these ignore the most likely sources of sexual harassment; it is not friendly interactions between colleagues that require intervention, but rather the dynamics that allow for powerful organizational members to serially engage in all forms of mistreatment, of which sexual harassment is often just one. We hope our research encourages further research on the boundaries between resource-bolstering SSB and sexual harassment in order to provide practical guidelines that prevent abuses of power but preserve enjoyable social interactions.

At the same time, our research should not be interpreted as suggesting that managers actively encourage SSB. Indeed, our findings in Study 1 (Sample 3) clearly suggest that managers themselves should avoid engaging in these behaviors with their subordinates. A manager cannot nor should be encouraged to attempt to artificially harness the beneficial consequences of enjoyed SSB. Rather we suggest these behaviors should not be unduly suppressed and punished when they occur naturally and autonomously amongst close colleagues who are not perturbed by them.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Our research has a number of strengths. First, we conducted multiple studies using participants employed across a wide variety of organizations, with different operationalizations of our focal variables and designs meant to overcome common problems in survey research, such as common method variance. In Study 2, we separated the measurement of our mediator and criterion variables, and in Study 3 we collected data from multiple sources. Furthermore, our research revealed consistent findings across the United States, Canada, and the Philippines, which differ meaningfully from one another on dimensions of culture (Church et al., 2012; Tenhiala et al., 2016). The cross-cultural consistency of our findings provides additional evidence of the robustness of our effects.

Our research is not without relevant limitations worth noting. First, the self-report nature of our SSB measure could be criticized because participants may inaccurately recall SSB or may be unwilling to report such behaviors due to social desirability concerns. It is not immediately clear to us how this methodological critique can be easily remedied, but future research should attempt to replicate our findings using measures that are less vulnerable to bias. Relatedly, our research was limited in that we were unable to produce causal conclusions. As such, future research might examine the outcomes of enjoyed SSB using experimental designs, though there are obvious practical challenges to exposing people to genuine SSB in lab settings. Alternatively, future research might employ a longitudinal design that follows the same set of employees over several months or years. Such a design would also address an additional limitation of our research: the predictor and the mediator in Study 2 were measured at the same time and by the same source.

An important caveat of our research is that we cannot make any conclusions about whether enjoyed flirtation has deleterious consequences that we did not measure. It is possible that even when enjoyed by a recipient, he or she could incur social costs. For example, recipients of flirtation might become sources of envy for colleagues or could be perceived as unprofessional, both of which could have negative consequences for their work lives (Chan-Serafin, Brief, & Watkins, 2013; Yount, 1991). Relatedly, beyond the recipient's experience, there is the potential for spillover effects to the observers. A pleasurable experience between two colleagues may result in other colleagues feeling uncomfortable (Aquino et al., 2014). Fortunately, the measure we develop in this research can be applied to future research wishing to investigate the full scope of benefits and costs, and the conditions under which SSB is more positive versus negative for a workgroup as a whole.

Finally, while our research focused on the beneficial consequences of enjoyed SSB, there is still much to be learned regarding the individual, contextual, and relational factors that influence whether SSB is experienced more positively versus negatively. We found that men enjoyed flirtation slightly more than women, and employees tended to dislike these behaviors when they were from a supervisor. It would be fruitful for future work to explore other individual (e.g., sociosexual orientation) and interpersonal factors (e.g., quality of the working relationship) that might influence the experience of SSB. Moreover, it is possible that the gender dynamics we uncovered in our research are different from those that emerge in non-heteronormative organizations and industries (such as those documented in Tilcsik, Anteby, & Knight, 2015). As such, it would be a worthy avenue for future research to determine whether the findings we obtained generalize to such contexts. Finally, future research might also explore how workplace climate, in terms of attitudes and policies around SSB, influences employees' reactions to SSB and the resources they derive. For example, it might be that in organizations that strictly police these behaviors, recipients find them less stress-relieving. We encourage researchers to pursue these avenues of inquiry.

6. Conclusion

It is our hope that the current work inspires future investigations into what we regard as a neglected area of research. To ignore the effects of enjoyed SSB is to miss the opportunity to gain a richer understanding of the full expression of human behavior in organizations. Though we fully recognize the dangers of certain forms of sexual behavior in organizations, our work suggests that there is an entire repertoire of SSB occurring in organizations that resides in a space that is distinct from sexual harassment. Ignoring this will only ensure that the literature contains a decidedly one-dimensional view of sexual behavior at work. Our research serves as a foundation for future theory that situates SSB as a potential mechanism by which employees might obtain validation, feel a sense of inclusion, and relieve stress.

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