Introduction

Myths and Realities: Sexual Harassment on Campus

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Dr. ------ asked me to come to his office to help him rearrange his books. Maybe it was my fault for going in the first place. He has these high bookcases, and the only way you can reach them is to stand on this little stool. I remember I had on this blue tight skirt that made it hard for me to step off and on that stool, but the skirt was pretty long. After a while, he got up and walked over and started bumping the stool. At first I thought he was just kidding around and I laughed. Then I got sort of scared because he almost knocked me over. I told him to be careful and that I didn’t think he knew I was really scared. “I know you are, but the only way to keep from falling is for you to go about your business while I lay down on the floor here and watch you.” I think that’s exactly how he said it. I didn’t know what else to do. I was afraid to leave, so I just kept on taking books down while he laid on the floor and looked up my dress at my underpants. Then I left, and he said, “thank you,” and never mentioned anything about it again. I guess I should have reported him to somebody, but I didn’t know who. No one would have believed it anyway.

(Dziech and Weiner, 1984, 10)

This statement by a woman college student illustrates several issues about sexual harassment that will be addressed in this book:

First, sexual victimization of women is not limited to cases of rape. Many women have experienced incidents of degrees of sexual harassment from blatant statements (e.g., making it clear that sexual activity is a prerequisite to a good grade or to being promoted) to more subtle verbal and physical
gestures (leering, ogling, brushing up against one's body, squeezing or pinching).

Second, traditional thinking blames the victim, suggesting that the woman behaves and/or dresses provocatively or explicitly initiates sexual activity in the hope of getting a good grade, raise, promotion, etc.

Third, because incidents of sexual harassment differ in the degree of coercion, they are difficult to define both legally and personally. Sexual harassment trades on women's uncertainty about how to define and self-validate their experiences. Consequently, women self-impose silence (as with cases of rape, incest, and battering) which, in turn, contributes to the continued invisibility of harassment.

Fourth, victims of sexual harassment may experience a lack of control over their own lives. They fear that protesting will call attention to them and fear reprisals by the harasser and his colleagues.

Fifth, women who experience sexual harassment are in a powerless position relative to the harasser (e.g., student versus professor; employee versus employer). Women believe that they themselves need to deal with harassment, that there is no point in public protest, for no one would believe them. And, it is precisely because men are more often in positions of greater power at work and in the academy that sexual harassment becomes both a possibility and a reality.

Although this college woman's statement illustrates an experience of a college student, harassment is experienced by women of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic class, occupation, physical appearance, sexual orientations, and relationship statuses. Sexual harassment is not simply an annoyance or flirtation. It can mean the difference between passing a college course or failing one, between being given a raise or being fired. For women who are supporting themselves and/or children, being fired to dismissed from work or leaving school for sexual noncompliance is disastrous. Thus, the potential for harassing women is enormous. Sexual harassment, like rape, incest, and battering, represent male expressions of power and dominance over women.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON CAMPUS:
DEFINITIONS AND INCIDENCE

The Project on the Status and Education of Women (1978) referred to sexual harassment as a "hidden issue." Although sexual harassment has only recently been labeled, it has been an issue women have always faced. Franklin, Moglen, Zatling-Boring, and Angress (1981) pointed out that:
On occasion, in certain forms, it appeared as romance: the naive student swept into bed by her brilliant professor. . . . Charlotte Brontë wrote about it more than a hundred years ago; in the popular confessions magazines, authors write about it still, in fictional form, it remains the stuff that fantasies are made of, fantasies that reflect and reinforce the tendency of our society to limit the definition of women to the sexual and domestic spheres and to soften . . . the linking of sexual dominance with the powerful and sexual submission with the powerless. (3)

Franklin et al. further distinguished between sexual and gender harassment. Gender harassment, a form of sexual harassment, consists principally of verbal behavior, i.e., remarks, jokes, and innuendos, which are directed at women because they are women. These behaviors may or may not be aimed at eliciting sexual cooperation from women. They are directed at individuals whom the initiator deems inferior. Therefore, gender harassment resembles racial and ethnic slurs and epithets.

In recent years, research has provided compelling evidence that sexual and gender harassment of students can result in serious psychological, emotional, physical, and economic consequences. Such harassment often forces students to forfeit research, work, and even their career plans. Research by Adams, Kottke, and Padgitt (1983) reported that 13 percent of the women students they surveyed said they had avoided taking a class or working with certain professors because of the risk of being subjected to sexual advances. Furthermore, a 1983 study conducted at Harvard University indicated that 15 percent of the graduate students and 12 percent of the undergraduate students who had been harassed by their professors changed their major or educational program because of the harassment. Wilson and Kraus (1983) reported that 8.9 percent of the female undergraduates in their study had been pinched, touched, or patted to the point of personal discomfort, while 17 percent of the women in the Adams et al. survey received verbal sexual advances, 13.6 percent received sexual invitations, 6.4 percent had been subjected to physical advances, and 2 percent received direct sexual bribes.

Bailey and Richards (1985) reported that of 246 women graduate students in their sample, 12.7 percent indicated they had been sexually harassed, 21 percent had not enrolled in a course to avoid such behavior, 11.3 percent tried to report the behavior, 2.6 percent dropped a course because of it, and 15.9 percent indicated they had been directly assaulted.

In one of the first comprehensive studies, Dziech and Weiner (1984) suggested that 30 percent of women students are harassed by at least one
professor during their four years in college. When definitions of sexual harassment include gender harassment, the incidence rate in student populations reaches close to 70 percent. Dzeich and Weiner reported that sexual harassment often "forces a student to forfeit work, research, educational comfort, or even career. Professors withhold legitimate opportunities from those who resist, or students withdraw rather than pay certain prices" (10). As Crocker and Simon (1981) suggested, "formal education is, in the United States, an important factor in an individual's career possibilities and personal development, therefore stunting or obstructing that person's educational accomplishment can have severe consequences" (542). To the extent that sexual and gender harassment exists in the academy, it constitutes a serious structural or institutional barrier to women's career development.

SEXUAL AND GENDER HARASSMENT ON CAMPUS: LEGAL ISSUES

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, administered by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is the law prohibiting sex discrimination against students. OCR's definition of sexual harassment is the following:

Sexual harassment consists of verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, imposed on the basis of sex, by an employee or agent of a recipient (of federal funds) that denies limits, provides different, or conditions the provision of aid, benefits, services, or treatment protected under Title IX.

No guidelines on sexual harassment have been issued for the Title IX. However, the parallels between Title VII (prohibition of sex discrimination in the workplace) and Title IX secure that harassment of students is a form of sex discrimination. Title IX has had a limited enforcement history, however. To date, the sole Title IX ruling directly dealing with the sexual harassment of students is Alexander v. Yale, filed in 1977 by a graduate of Yale University, Ronni Alexander, who stated that she "found it impossible to continue playing the flute and abandoned her study of the instrument, thus aborting her desired professional career," because of her professor's repeated sexual advances, "including coerced sexual intercourse." In addition, Alexander stated that although she complained to Yale officials about the harassment, she "was discouraged and intimidated by unresponsive administrators and complex and ad hoc methods." Ronni Alexander was joined in her legal action by four students, Margery Reifler, Pamela Price, Lisa Stone, and Ann Olivarius, who claimed that Yale
University’s tolerance of sexual harassment created an intimidating atmosphere that was conducive to neither teaching nor learning. These claims were dismissed by the court on the grounds that the charges were “untenable,” “moot,” or “inadequate.” Ronni Alexander’s original complaint was dismissed by the United States Court of Appeals, which maintained that she had failed to prove her case and that Yale University had adequately addressed her concern by setting up a sexual harassment grievance procedure.

A major significance of Alexander v. Yale is that the District Court decision upheld that if sexual harassment does occur, it may constitute sex discrimination. The ruling maintained that:

It is perfectly reasonable to maintain that academic advancement conditioned upon submission to sexual demands constitutes sex discrimination in education, just as questions of job retention or promotion tied to sexual demands from supervisors have become increasingly recognized as potential violations of Title VII’s ban against sex discrimination in employment.

During the litigation of Alexander v. Yale, the Report of the Dean’s Advisory Committee on Grievance Procedure at Yale was published. It claimed that the effects of harassment on students may endure past their graduation:

Though sexual harassment in any situation is reprehensible, it must be a matter of particularly deep concern to an academic community in which students and faculty are related by strong bonds of intellectual dependence and trust. Further, the vulnerability of undergraduates to such harassment is particularly great and the potential impact upon them is particularly severe. Not only does sexual harassment betray the special bond between teacher and student, but it also exploits unfairly the power inherent in an instructor’s relationship to his or her student. Through grades, recommendations, research appointments, or job referrals an instructor can have a decisive influence on a student’s academic success and future career. If this influence should be used overtly or implicitly in an attempt to exact sexual favors, a situation is created that may have devastating implications for individual students and for the academic community as a whole. Through fear of academic reprisal, a student may be forced to comply with sexual demands at the price of a debilitating personal anguish, or to withdraw from a course, a major, or even a career, and thus is forced to change plans for a life’s work.
IN THEIR OWN VOICES:
WOMEN DISCUSS HARASSMENT ON CAMPUS

Identical sentiments were obtained from undergraduate women in a recent study by Dovan, Grossman, Kindermann, Matula, Paludi, and Scott (1987). Women reported, when describing a college woman's experience with sexual harassment:

The professor violated her right to privacy and overstepped the boundaries of his authority as a professor.

It seems clear that the professor was taking advantage of this student as a professor. He probably felt secure that the student would not say anything, and if she did, would not be believed.

Psychologically, the fact that he is a professor with power over your grades and other stuff can't be underestimated. Otherwise he wouldn't have been able to get her to his office. Students are used to taking orders from professors.

Men are socialized to be the sexual aggressor and to believe that women should be the object of that aggression.

Male dominance is apparent in most every aspect of our society. It is so ingrained in our culture that often it goes unrecognized.

The following accounts all illustrate the extent and negative consequences of being in an environment conducive to harassment:

Dr. P. gave me the creeps. Whenever we took a test, I'd look up from my paper, and there he would be staring at me. He was always looking at my top or my legs. I quit wearing skirts to that class because I was so uncomfortable around him. I felt like I was some kind of freak in a zoo. (Dziech and Weiner, 1984, 92)

One of my professors had singled me out in the classroom and would detain me after the class—always to talk. I was brief but polite. But one day he saw me on campus and stopped me. He made some very suggestive comments, off-color remarks. Then he proceeded to tell me how he would like to come in my room with me at the dorm. At first I ignored the comment, but he repeated it. I shook my head no and tried to laugh it off. After that I tried to ignore him and make it quite obvious my intentions as a student. I was very angry and
disgusted and shocked. I also felt very helpless and trapped. I talked about it with people—women police, etc.—but it didn’t really seem to resolve the situation. As far as grades go, I made sure that I got good grades in class so he couldn’t possibly flunk me. (Dziech and Weiner, 1984, 94)

SEXUAL AND GENDER HARASSMENT: EXPLANATORY MODELS

Many of the explanations of the extent of sexual and gender harassment have tended to be satisfied with results that pinpoint this issue within the individual rather than in the situation or social structure. This explanation may be seen as a rationale for maintaining the status quo and permits women who complain about harassment to remain isolated. This isolation in turn leaves women at a disadvantage. Tangri, Burt, and Johnson (1982) identified this explanation as the natural/biological model of harassment. They have also identified two additional models: organizational and sociocultural, which have recently been used as theoretical models for understanding sexual harassment.

The natural/biological model interprets sexual and gender harassment as natural sexual attraction between people. This model maintains that harassing behavior is a natural expression of men’s stronger sex drive and/or any person may be attracted to another individual and pursue that attraction without intent to harass. The natural/biological model has been used in court by universities as well as corporations seeking to avoid charges of sex discrimination for allowing sexual harassment to exist. This model continues to be the interpretation of sexual harassment most in need of modification in order to bring sexual harassment under the purview of sex discrimination statutes. The model rests on several assumptions about sexual and gender harassment and in the workplace that deny that it is illegal and discriminatory. This model denies the consequences of sexual and gender harassment on women’s educational and physical health, career aspirations, and job security. Tangri et al. pointed out that if the natural/biological model was adequate in explaining sexual harassment, then certain conditions should be the norm, e.g., women recipients should be similar to their male harassers in age, race, and occupational status, they should be unmarried; the behaviors should resemble courtship behaviors, and should stop once the woman shows disinterest. In addition, women should report feeling flattered by the behavior, not offended.

Tangri et al. tested this model with data from the U.S. Merit Board Study; it was not supported:
The consistent negative reactions of female victims to incidents they consider harassing, plus the tendency of individuals with greater degrees of personal vulnerability and dependence on their job to experience more harassment constitute the strongest evidence available in these data against the natural model. (52)

They found more support for the organizational and sociocultural models. The organizational model asserts that sexual and gender harassment results from the opportunities presented by power and authority relations which derive from the hierarchical structure of organizations. Thus, sexual harassment is seen as an issue of organizational power. As Tangri et al. claimed:

Since work organizations are characterized by vertical stratification, individuals can use their power and position to extort sexual gratification from their subordinates. Although typically males harass females, in principle, it is possible for females to sexually harass males. It is less likely only because women tend to be employed in occupations subordinate to men. (37)

Thus, the organizational model holds that institutions provide the opportunity structure that makes sexual and gender harassment possible. This model also explains why women may feel less comfortable, receive less professional support, and fewer intellectual challenges from male colleagues. Women are viewed by this model as being vulnerable to the economic, psychological, social, and physical consequences of sexual and gender harassment. This model thus relates sexual and gender harassment to aspects of the structure of academia and the workplace that provide asymmetrical relations between supervisors (e.g., male professors) and subordinates (e.g., female students).

The sociocultural model posits that sexual and gender harassment is only one manifestation of the much larger patriarchal system in which men are the dominant group. Therefore, harassment is an example of men asserting their personal power, based on sex. According to this model, sex would be a better predictor of both recipient and initiator status than would organizational position. Thus, women should be much more likely to be victims of sexual harassment, especially when they are in male-populated college majors. As Tangri et al. noted:

If sexual harassment is as widespread as the results of the MSPB survey indicate, it may approximate a random event in women’s working lives—something that is highly likely to happen at some time
with just when, where, and how being so multidetermined that prediction is difficult. This very fact supports the cultural model in some ways, but it also implies that finding empirical support for the cultural model will not be easy, if only because few, if any, circumstances exist where the dominant culture does not exert its influence. (52-53)

Gutek and Morasch (1982) have proposed an additional explanatory model of harassment: sex-role spillover. This is the carry over into the workplace of gender role based expectations of behavior. The spillover, predicated on skewed sex ratios in the workplace, is of two types. First, women who are employed in non-traditional occupations or are in non-traditional college majors, where they operate under a “token” status, will be treated as role deviates; they will be particularly salient as women (because of their singularity) and they will be treated different from their male colleagues. Second, women in female-populated careers will experience sex-role spillover, but of a different nature because their work parallels gender-role expectations. The former group of women are treated differently from their male colleagues and are more likely to report incidences of harassment than the latter group, who are relatively unaware that their treatment is based on their sex. In sum, the first kind of sex-role spillover is to the women, while the second kind of sex-role spillover is to the field (i.e., sex-typing of the occupation of major) per se.

The sex-role spillover explanation is compatible with the sociocultural model of harassment discussed by Tangri et al. (1982). As Gutek and Morasch pointed out, “according to the power differential hypothesis, sexual harassment will always be perceived as sexual harassment” (72). Support for this explanation is available from several sources (Shullman and Fitzgerald, 1985; Till, 1980). Researchers have found evidence of greater incidence of sexual and gender harassment of women in non-traditional areas.

IVORY POWER REVISITED:
IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING PROGRAMS

Recently, Dovan, Grossman, Kindermann, Matula, Paludi, and Scott (1987) reported that college women were more likely to label a faculty member’s harassment of a woman student in terms of his abusing his power as a professor over the student instead of abusing his power as a man. They recognized sexual harassment as allowing professors to undermine students’ positions in higher education. This finding supports the organizational model of harassment: women were able to explain harassment as
resulting from the opportunities presented by power and authority relations which derive from the hierarchical structure of the academy. This adherence to the organizational model promoted more of a sense of empowerment for women students: they reported seeking redress for the victimization. Such response would not be predicted from adherence to the sociocultural model: women would not be likely to take interpersonally assertive action or to act on an expectation that the organization will help them resolve the issue.

These findings have implications for training programs for raising consciousness about harassment, especially about sexual jokes, requests for sexual favors and how images of women may affect individuals’ perceptions of women’s career commitment. This is especially important for training programs dealing with re-entry women as students and the unique issues they, as a group, raise as well as the harassment of women of color.

Another focus of such training lies in the politics involved in the mentor-protégé relationship. Typically, this relationship is not clearly conceptualized. Consequently, students and faculty do not share similar definitions of mentor and protégé (Haring-Hidore and Brooks, 1986; Paludi, 1987). Mentors are seen as essential because they generate power. Training of faculty about students’ perceptions of power would be useful, especially given the recent results by Fitzgerald, Gold, Ormerod, and Weitzman (1988). Male faculty members who participated in this study typically denied that there exists an inherent power differential between students and faculty. Thus, educational programs are needed to deal with women’s and men’s understanding of the concept of harassment and the social meanings attributed to behaviors that legally constitute harassment. Truax (cited in Fitzgerald, 1986) claimed “men’s perceptions of what their behavior means are vastly different from women’s. . . . We find, in working with victims of sexual harassment that there is often little disagreement with what has happened between student and professor, but rather, with what the conduct means. Professors will try to justify their behavior on the grounds that they are just friendly and trying to make a student feel welcome, or they thought that the student would be flattered by the attention” (24). However, the interpretation given to the professor’s behavior by women students is not flattery or friendliness. The consequences of being harassed to undergraduate and graduate women have been devastating to their physical well-being, emotional health, and vocational development, including depression, insomnia, headaches, helplessness, decreased motivation (Whitmore, 1983). The behaviors that legally constitute harassment are just that, despite what the professor’s intentions may be. It is the power differential and/or the woman’s reaction to the behavior that are the critical variables.
And it is this misuse of the power or authority by male faculty members that this book addresses. *Ivory Power* discusses sexual and gender harassment as the confluence of power relations and sexism in an institution stratified by sex. The contributors to this volume are all actively involved with sexual harassment cases as attorneys, researchers, clinicians, training consultants, and members of sexual harassment task forces on campuses in the United States. For example, Mary Koss and Kathryn Quinlan describe the interrelationships among rape and sexual harassment in terms of the consequences to women survivors. Louise Fitzgerald offers psychometric work to the measurement of sexual harassment, which has led to a more refined definition of the construct. She and Lauren Weitzman, in addition to Sue Rosenberg Zalk, discuss harassment in terms of male faculty members' views of women students and faculty members. Sandra Shullman and Barbara Watts address legal issues involved in harassment of students and workers. Darlene DeFour discusses the incidence and dimensions of sexual and gender harassment of women of color on campus and how this victimization contributes to the attrition rate in graduate training programs. Donna Stringer and her colleagues discuss clinical interventions with women survivors of harassment. Discussions of the establishment and maintenance of task forces are presented by Dorothy O. Helly, K.C. Wagner, and Mary Kay Biaggio and her colleagues. Louise Fitzgerald also discusses developmental issues involved in sexual and gender harassment: how women faculty, administrators, and staff experience harassment and their individual, legal, and institutional methods of seeking redress for harassment.

All contributors to this volume are committed to generating a feminist agenda for research, theorizing, education, and practice concerning these key issues in academic sexual and gender harassment. All have made specific recommendations to guide instructors, practitioners, and researchers in the continuing search for improved knowledge and practice in this barrier to women's career development. All contributors have, in their roles as professor, dean, student, and counselor, transformed the way the campus views sexual and gender harassment.

References


presented at the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, CA.


