



Sexual Harassment – Changing the System

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Shifting the Burden

We have to find a way to change the system - to take the pressure off the young women in the most vulnerable stages of their careers and shift it to the senior men, many of whom have admitted to knowing this “open secret” for years if not decades.

--Joan Schmelz (Oct 2015)



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NATURE | COLUMN: WORLD VIEW



Change the system to halt harassment

Universities and their senior staff must do more to deter, detect and punish all forms of inappropriate behaviour, says [Joan Schmelz](#).

08 February 2016



PDF



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Sexual harassment is a vile plague on science. I know this because I am asked regularly for help and advice by women who have been harassed. And the problem has been laid out for the broader research community in a series of recent cases. The US National Science Foundation,

Women In Astronomy

Monday, April 11, 2016

Sexual Harassment - Changing the System I

Posted by Joan Schmelz



Women In Astronomy

Wednesday, May 11, 2016

Sexual Harassment - Changing the System II

Posted by Joan Schmelz



What some senior men said

- ▶ I knew about it but I didn't say/do anything because
 - ▶ It was none of my business
 - ▶ I didn't want to intrude
 - ▶ I didn't know what to do
 - ▶ I thought I might make it worse
 - ▶ It's not my problem
 - ▶ Boys will be boys



Rebuilding the System

- ▶ Train those with privilege, especially senior men, to become
 - ▶ allies who can support individuals
 - ▶ advocates who will add their voices and prestige to fight,
- ▶ Create a “safe space” where anyone facing sexual harassment can get help and advice,
- ▶ Shine a light on the harassers who still operate in the shadows, destroying careers with their unprofessional conduct.



Harnessing Power

- ▶ Target audience includes people with power:
 - ▶ senior men and women
 - ▶ department chairs, deans, and provosts at universities
 - ▶ council members, presidents & executive officers of professional organizations.
- ▶ Women In Astronomy Blog has already circulated advice for anyone facing sexual harassment
 - ▶ <http://womeninastronomy.blogspot.com/2013/05/advice-dealing-with-discrimination-and.html>



In the News . . .

Aug 13	McGinn	Univ of Miami	Philosophy
Oct 13	Zivkovic	Sci Amer	Blogger
Dec 14	Lewin	MIT	Physics
Oct 15	Marcy	Berkeley	Astronomy
Jan 15	Slater	Wyoming	Astronomy
Jan 15	Ott	Caltech	Astronomy
Feb 15	Lieb	Chicago	Biology
Feb 15	Richmond	AMNH	Anthro

Me & My Sheroes

Some of the women who have helped make a difference



Sarah Gossan



Heather Flewelling



Ruth Murray-Clay



Debra Fischer



Joan Schmelz



Sarah Ballard



Jessica Kirkpatrick



Io Kleiser



Samaya Nissanke

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Becoming Allies and Advocates

Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ Many senior people in our community admitted to knowing the “open secret”
- ▶ How can it be that so many did so little for so long while so much damage was being done?
- ▶ Think of all those young women, undergrads at a nationally renowned university, who left the field because their professor made a creepy advance.
- ▶ Think of all the discoveries they could have made but never will because they left astronomy before their careers had even begun.



**Please don't interrupt us
while we're ignoring you**

Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ For those who turn a blind eye, how do we make them see the damage being done by one of their colleagues?
- ▶ For those who knew what was going on but felt powerless, how do we provide them with the means to make a difference?
- ▶ How can we turn spectators into allies and allies into advocates?



Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ You can project to students that you are a safe person to come to for advice (and to improve your department's climate along the way) by simply interjecting,
- ▶ "I disagree."
- ▶ Whenever inappropriate or sexist comments come up in group discussion. This small phrase can go a long way.
- ▶ If someone comes to you with a problem, don't immediately question their story.
- ▶ *Instead, listen respectfully.*
- ▶ You can be sure that if action is going to be taken, all of the appropriate questions will be asked later.



Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ Know your university's
 - ▶ Sexual harassment policy
 - ▶ Campus resources
 - ▶ Mandatory reporting requirements.

- ▶ Are these things easy to find on the university web site? If not, why not?



ADVOCACY



PREVENTION



OUTREACH

Sexual Harassment Campus Resources

Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ An important step in becoming an ally is Bystander training.
- ▶ It is a variation on the, “See something, say something,” slogan from Homeland Security.
- ▶ That is, if you see inappropriate behavior, it is your business to intervene.
- ▶ Bystander training programs can give people the permission they needed to speak up where they were **afraid of intruding or of making things worse.**



Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ There are several good Bystander training programs,
 - ▶ stepupprogram.org/facilitators/
 - ▶ <http://www.npr.org/2014/04/30/308058438/training-men-and-women-on-campus>
- ▶ Find out if your campus offers Bystander training.
- ▶ If it does, take the training.
- ▶ If it does not, work with campus resources to set it up.
- ▶ Design and facilitate a session on stopping sexual harassment.



Becoming Allies and Advocates

- ▶ How do we improve sexual harassment training?
- ▶ Most official training given by corporations is described as a waste of time, superficial, and obvious,
- ▶ Even, most regrettably, an instruction manual on how to “improve my technique,” “stay off the radar,” or “not get caught.”
- ▶ Has anyone even participated in sexual harassment training that was useful and informative?
- ▶ If not, why not? Do we have to create such training?



Department Chairs

Department Chairs

- ▶ Department chairs are the first line of defense.
- ▶ They have the power to
 - ▶ change the climate and
 - ▶ create an environment where everyone can do their best work.
- ▶ They should think of this as a fundamental component of their job description:
 - ▶ File reports, Balance budgets, Write proposals,
 - ▶ Hire postdocs, Supervise students, Manage staff
 - ▶ Eliminate sexual harassment.



Department Chairs

- ▶ Be familiar with the anti-harassment policy & the resources available across campus.
- ▶ Review the policy and introduce these resources to department members.
- ▶ Post the policy and resources in a prominent place in the department.
- ▶ Make sure they are clearly identified so everyone has access when they need it.
- ▶ This makes it clear that the department thinks this is important and takes it seriously.



Department Chairs

- ▶ Convene a department meeting on the topic of sexual harassment.
- ▶ Use campus resources to help design and run the meeting.
- ▶ The current policy and available resources should be discussed.
- ▶ Encouraged everyone to share their views on the workplace climate
 - ▶ with the entire group,
 - ▶ in smaller targeted meetings, or
 - ▶ anonymously.



Department Chairs

- ▶ Affirm that harassment is not tolerated.
- ▶ Lead by example.
- ▶ Conduct a department survey of gender climate.
- ▶ Implement the suggestions.



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University Administrators

University Administrators

- ▶ Every university needs an office where students/postdocs/ faculty/staff can talk anonymously about harassment.
- ▶ For lack of a better name, I am going to refer to it as the **Office of Good Advice**.
 - ▶ Ombudsperson
 - ▶ Diversity and Inclusion
 - ▶ Counseling Center
- ▶ This office must be fundamentally separate from any office responsible for reporting under Title IX:
 - ▶ Affirmative Action office,
 - ▶ University Lawyer, or
 - ▶ University Police.



University Administrators

- ▶ Office of Good Advice should be
 - ▶ well known to everyone on campus,
 - ▶ staffed with trained professionals, and
 - ▶ the first thing that comes up on a web search for “sexual harassment.”
- ▶ Anyone on campus who needs to talk about harassment issues should know which university employees are
 - ▶ obligated to report incidents and
 - ▶ can keep reports confidential.



University Administrators

- ▶ Every university needs an Office of Good Advice not only because
 - ▶ Students fear that they might be pressed to make a formal, legally viable report,
 - ▶ Staff in the legally responsible offices are often, with no malicious intent, unable to listen objectively and sensitively.



University Administrators

- ▶ Students report that they were asked intimidating and inappropriate questions that appeared to undermine the validity of their complaint like,
 - ▶ “Were you drinking?” or
 - ▶ “Are you unhappy with your grade in his course?”
- ▶ No matter how well-meaning, staff members in offices responsible for upholding the law cannot help but be influenced by that responsibility and by knowing the requirements of an investigation.



University Administrators

Staff

- ▶ should be selected for their sensitivity and ability to listen empathetically.
- ▶ should never resort to leading, victim-blaming questions
- ▶ should be trained about the risks of biasing a report, i.e., the office needs professional staff who would say, “Please tell me more about that.”
- ▶ need to be able to protect the identity of those seeking their help, discuss available options for filing complaints, and follow up.



The Second Report

The Second Report

- ▶ Someone in the Office of Good Advice needs to be responsible for keeping track of multiple complaints about the same harasser.
- ▶ A university, by its very nature, has a fluid student body and postdoc population.
- ▶ One of the ways that serial harassers can continue harassing is by targeting
 - ▶ one individual at a time,
 - ▶ perhaps in different classes,
 - ▶ perhaps years apart
- ▶ So that the targets never meet each other and never even know about each other.



The Second Report

- ▶ Psychologists reminds us that the absolute best predictor of behavior is previous behavior of the same kind,
- ▶ So a second report is a serious indicator of serial behavior.
- ▶ Each incidence of sexual harassment increases the probability of the next, so there is significant risk in waiting for a third or fourth report before taking action.
- ▶ Universities could reduce significantly the damage done by an individual serial harasser by establishing a means of recognizing a **second report** and acting promptly to eliminate this predatory behavior from campus.



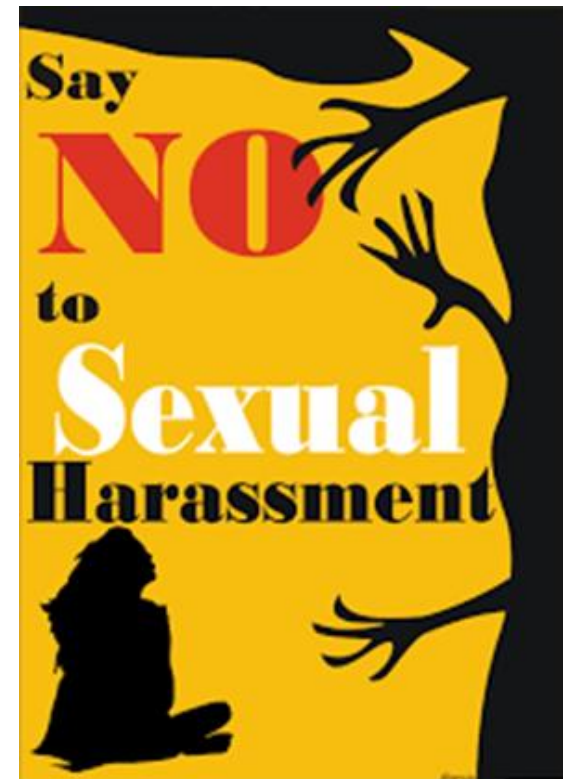
The Second Report

- ▶ If you had to deal with the predatory behavior of a sexual harasser, would you want to know that others had faced similar situations?
- ▶ Would you want to talk to them about their experiences and how they dealt with this behavior?
- ▶ If you were contemplating filing a complaint about your harasser, would you want to know if there was a previous report about the same perpetrator?
- ▶ Would it make a difference in your willingness to file the report to learn that you are not the first?



The Second Report

- ▶ Currently, sexual harassment reports are filed under the name of the complainant, in part to protect the identity of the alleged harasser.
- ▶ One small step in the right direction would be to file the report under the name of said harasser.
- ▶ There is reason to be careful, but the law makes it clear that universities have the flexibility to investigate thoroughly.
- ▶ For more on this idea, see the post on [Information Escrows](#) by Mordecai-Mark Mac Low, which is part of the Fed Up with Sexual Harassment series on the Women In Astronomy Blog.
- ▶ http://womeninastronomy.blogspot.com/2014/09/fed-up-with-sexual-harassment-ii_9.html



The background features a dark purple to black gradient. There are several decorative elements: a small pink rectangle in the top right corner, a large dark purple circle in the upper right, a medium dark purple circle in the lower right, and a large, faint dark purple circle in the lower left. The text "Understanding Title IX" is centered in the lower half of the image.

Understanding Title IX

Understanding Title IX

- ▶ The law defines sexual harassment as behavior that is “sufficiently severe, persistent, **OR** pervasive to limit a student's ability to participate in **OR** benefit from an educational program, **OR** creates a hostile **OR** abusive educational environment” (emphasis mine).
- ▶ Students, faculty, and staff sometimes misinterpret these words to mean that the severe, persistent or pervasive behavior is the definition of a “hostile environment” and do not understand that these terms can stand on their own.
- ▶ Behavior that many people might regard as relatively innocuous but is persistent or targeted or timed to have a negative desired effect can limit a student's ability to learn.



Understanding Title IX

- ▶ Students who were
 - ▶ harassed to the point of tears,
 - ▶ afraid to return to class, or
 - ▶ even considering dropping out of school
- ▶ Might still think that the behavior of the harasser wasn't severe enough
- ▶ Because of a misreading or misinterpretation of Title IX



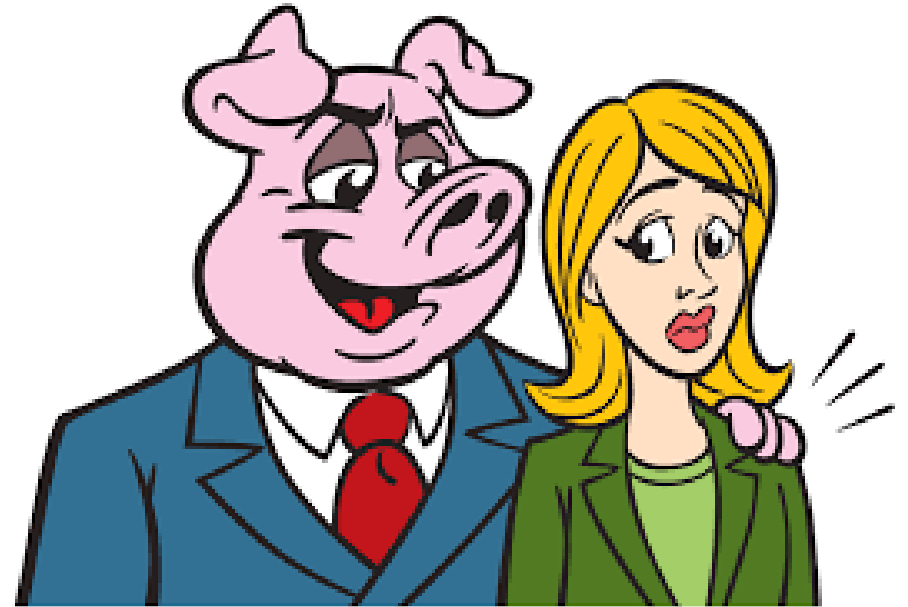
Understanding Title IX

- ▶ Another misunderstanding might be related to making a case against sexual assault rather than reporting sexual harassment.
- ▶ For example, a counselor might ask,
 - ▶ “Did you tell him to stop?”
- ▶ A careful reading of Title IX shows that the law does not define sexual harassment as behavior that was objected to or even as behavior that was refused or resisted.



Understanding Title IX

- ▶ A student may even comply or go along with behavior that is unwelcome out of
 - ▶ embarrassment,
 - ▶ fear,
 - ▶ shock, or
 - ▶ confusion.
- ▶ Behavior that was not unwelcome the first time, or not immediately recognized as unwelcome, may become very unwelcome the second or third time.



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Presidents/Executive Officers

Presidents/Executive Officers

- ▶ Professional organizations also have anti-harassment policies.
- ▶ I heard the hierarchy of my own organization claim that they had never had a sexual harassment complaint.
- ▶ My take on this is NOT that there is no sexual harassment at our meetings
- ▶ Rather the policy (the one that I wrote!) is not working effectively.
- ▶ How can we change it to be more effective?
- ▶ The policy was meant to evolve as new situations arise and new information comes to light.
- ▶ We need to update the policy.



UPDATE

Presidents/Executive Officers

- ▶ Suppose a situation arises that is not covered by the existing policy, but the evidence is strong enough that everyone involved realizes that the policy needs to be updated.
- ▶ The members of the executive council should see the limitations of the policy in its current form and share the specifics of the individual case with a standing panel of experts – perhaps those that wrote the policy in the first place.



Presidents/Executive Officers

- ▶ The best analogy I can think of is a FISA Court judge who must make an immediate decision for surveillance warrants against foreign spies inside the United States based on the evidence presented.
- ▶ This panel of experts should be in a position to act like the FISA court judge and make a decision quickly, say in a matter of weeks, where all the evidence is evaluated and investigated.



Presidents/Executive Officers

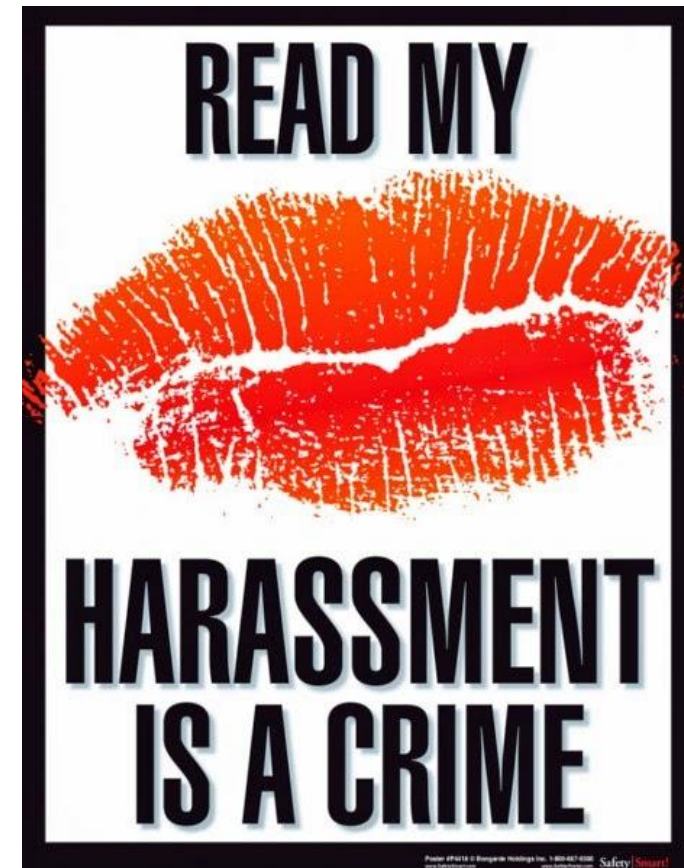
- ▶ In parallel, the current policy can be amended to more easily address future cases.
- ▶ This process is more analogous to the criminal court judge where the wheels of justice turn much more slowly, say months to a year.
- ▶ This would be the timeframe required to ratify and implement an updated policy.



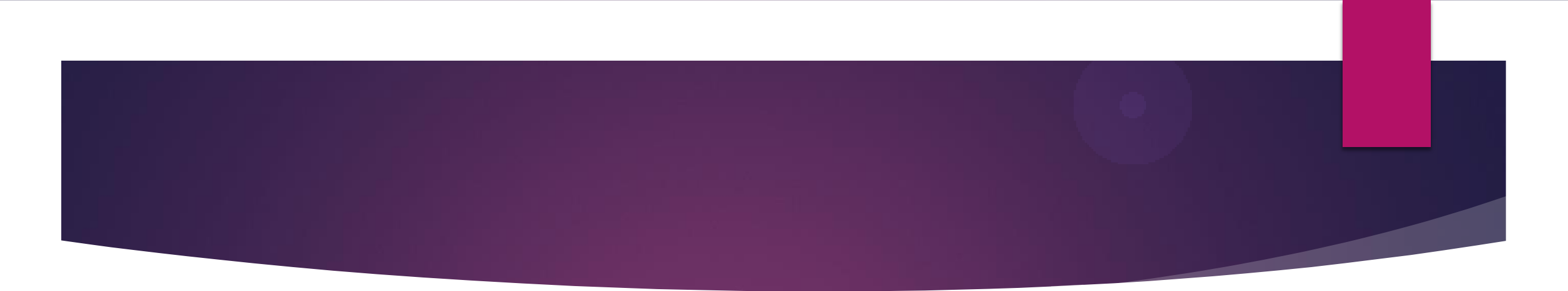
In Closing

- ▶ We should all want to work in an environment where everyone can do their best science.
- ▶ Therefore, since addressing sexual harassment improves the department climate and makes things better for everyone.
- ▶ This is everyone's problem and everyone's responsibility.
- ▶ Let's work together to create a community that is free from sexual harassment.

Thanks to Anne Byrnes, Ruth Murray-Clay, Megan Reiter, Mike Simon, and several anonymous sources.





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- ▶ Apparently Yale and other places alert the campus community after a complaint has been filed and resolved. My understanding is that this is an emails that essentially states that there was an issue of X nature and Y has been done to address it. For legal reasons, identifying details have been scrubbed of the email.
 - ▶ Transparency (or rather lack thereof) certainly mattered in escalating Marcy-gate, but perhaps these sorts of statements are a step in the right direction. Ideally, they (1) provide some accountability, (2) demonstrate that the University takes the issue seriously, and (3) indirectly provides some guidance to connect others in need of support to reporting pathways. Might be worth considering as another way to change the system.
 - ▶ Why would any man mentor a women? False accusations of sexual harassment