

CALL IT BY ITS NAME: A PARTIAL GLOSSARY ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT FOR FACULTY MEMBERS
APPELER LES CHOSE PAR LEUR NOM: LEXIQUE PARTIEL DU HARCELEMENT SEXUEL ENTRE MEMBRES DU CORPS PROFESSORAL

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Volume 53, Number 3, Fall 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1058421ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1058421ar>

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Education, McGill University

ISSN

1916-0666 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Hurren, W. (2018). CALL IT BY ITS NAME: A PARTIAL GLOSSARY ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT FOR FACULTY MEMBERS. *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 53(3).
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1058421ar>

Article abstract

This partial glossary of words and phrases expands awareness regarding sexual harassment occurring among faculty members, to encourage a culture of not keeping secrets about sexual harassment. Media attention has shed light on the levels of sexual harassment faced by students in higher education, yet silence surrounds levels of harassment faced by faculty members, and this is a phenomenon that also affects students and learning. Intersectionality and the influence of power dynamics in higher education are acknowledged as mitigating factors in cases of sexual harassment. Structural aspects of higher education that enable a "secrets code" are outlined, along with possible strategies to both reduce and report incidents of sexual harassment.

CALL IT BY ITS NAME: A PARTIAL GLOSSARY ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT FOR FACULTY MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT. This partial glossary of words and phrases expands awareness regarding sexual harassment occurring among faculty members, to encourage a culture of not keeping secrets about sexual harassment. Media attention has shed light on the levels of sexual harassment faced by students in higher education, yet silence surrounds levels of harassment faced by faculty members, and this is a phenomenon that also affects students and learning. Intersectionality and the influence of power dynamics in higher education are acknowledged as mitigating factors in cases of sexual harassment. Structural aspects of higher education that enable a “secrets code” are outlined, along with possible strategies to both reduce and report incidents of sexual harassment.

APPELER LES CHOSES PAR LEUR NOM: LEXIQUE PARTIEL DU HARCÈLEMENT SEXUEL ENTRE MEMBRES DU CORPS PROFESSORAL

RÉSUMÉ. Ce lexique partiel de mots et d'expressions enrichit la prise de conscience en lien avec le harcèlement sexuel se produisant entre membres du corps professoral. Il encourage une culture de divulgation, de ne pas garder pour soi des secrets concernant le harcèlement sexuel. Les médias ont mis en lumière les degrés d'harcèlement sexuel auxquels font face les étudiants en enseignement supérieur. Or, un silence entoure encore les niveaux de harcèlement auxquels les membres des facultés sont confrontés et ce, même si ce phénomène affecte également les étudiants et l'apprentissage. L'intersectionnalité et les jeux d'influence en place aux cycles supérieurs sont reconnus comme des facteurs aggravants en cas de harcèlement sexuel. Les dimensions structurelles des cycles supérieurs, qui permettent un « code de secrets », sont explicitées et des stratégies possibles pour réduire et rapporter les incidents de harcèlement sexuel sont listées.

PREFACE TO THE GLOSSARY

This partial glossary of words and phrases was compiled with the intention of expanding awareness regarding sexual harassment occurring among faculty members in higher education and to encourage a culture of not keeping secrets about sexual harassment.¹ The influence of power dynamics among faculty is a major component of sexual harassment, and a major barrier to letting go of the secrets. Possible strategies for breaking the “secrets code” are included in this glossary, along with, perhaps, some healing words for those who have been keeping secrets that have affected their levels of comfort and success in their work / life in higher education.

For over 20 years, I’ve been a faculty member working in Canadian institutions of higher education, holding various ranks and roles, including administration, and I’ve always been subordinate to someone, usually a man. I have a hunch – based on recent media attention, related literature, and my personal experiences as someone who identifies as a woman – that most situations of sexual harassment in higher education among faculty are not reported, and many people who have been the targets of sexual harassment hold secrets that are toxic.

The policy on sexualized violence at my own institute of higher education, the University of Victoria (UVic, 2017), includes the following acts of sexual misconduct as forms of sexualized violence: sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, and the distribution of sexually explicit images of someone, without their permission. This partial glossary has a focus on sexual harassment, because it is a form of violence that can be subtle, secretive, and prolonged. Targets of sexual harassment often find it difficult to name.

Recent media attention and literature has brought to light the levels of sexual harassment faced by students in higher education (Association of American Universities (AAU), 2015; Everett-Green, 2018; Kelsky, 2017; Mangan, 2017), and it appears that increased numbers of graduate students are reporting sexual harassment. While it’s clear that graduate students are facing high levels of sexual harassment, and many of the cases reported involve faculty members as the perpetrators, little attention has been afforded to harassment among faculty members themselves. Given the many power differentials and levels of privacy and confidentiality at play, available data surrounding faculty members facing harassment is minimal.

A 2018 Angus Reid Institute poll revealed that one in two people who identify as women face sexual harassment in the workplace, and one in five people who identify as men face sexual harassment (Part 3: Scale of the issue, para. 3). Faculty members in higher education aren’t immune to power abuses and coercive situations. Given the entrenched stratification and gendered hierarchies among faculty in higher education, levels of harassment and associated levels of secrecy may be even higher than in the general workplace population.

Workplace data often focuses on people who identify as women being those harassed, and people who identify as men being the perpetrators. However, the perpetrators of sexual harassment in higher education or in any workplace can be those who identify along various points of a gender spectrum, and likewise for the targets of sexual harassment. Power over is the common factor at play. I use the inclusive term “people” wherever possible, in the entries in this glossary.

Earlier research by Kidder, Lafleur, and Wells (1995) revealed that having the language and words to name an incident as sexual harassment more immediately enables people to “talk back’ and take action” (p. 61). The “named construction of harassment” (p. 61) is key to empowering people who face sexual harassment. This partial glossary has the intention of making it easier to call sexual harassment by its name, and by doing so, to both reduce incidents and increase reporting of sexual harassment among faculty in higher education. Words of warning: some of the glossary entries are discouraging, e.g., *Systemic / structural issues of higher education that enable a “secrets code,”* and, *Avoidance* (on the part of faculty members and institutions) as a common response to sexual harassment.

Compiling this partial glossary is one step towards changing the workplace in higher education so that everyone will feel comfortable coming to work every day and no one has to keep a secret they don’t want to keep. Readers are invited to respond with comments and/or perhaps even contribute additional terms or phrases to this partial glossary.

PARTIAL GLOSSARY

A

Academic leadership

The main criteria for the leadership required in combatting sexual harassment among faculty is “having received tenure.” While tenured faculty members might be serving as directors or chairs or in decanal roles, these roles are only secondary to the type of leadership that becomes possible through tenure. This type of academic leadership could look like: tenured faculty members requesting sexual harassment workshops and educational opportunities for staff, faculty, and for those in administrative roles; tenured faculty members calling for all new hires and sessional instructors to receive information about naming sexual harassment in the workplace; tenured faculty members raising related issues at department and faculty meetings and providing information about reporting, or requesting someone from an affirmative action or equity office to speak at meetings; tenured faculty members confronting people who harass others; tenured faculty members initiating crowdsourcing surveys for the purpose of anonymously sharing narratives of harassment; tenured faculty members bringing forward complaints when they have been harassed.

Perhaps if those in leadership positions as described above, talk about / write about / attend to sexual harassment among faculty (and here I'm not referring to exposing individuals or institutions; it's the overall situation that requires more exposure), it could be a step towards a more positive and inclusive experience for all within higher education: staff, faculty, and students.

Airing dirty laundry

A euphemistic phrase sometimes used to explain why institutions of higher education have been reluctant to tackle sexual harassment. It also explains to some extent, why people don't report sexual harassment: they fear the institutional response will be to sweep it under the rug: another euphemism. Notice how these tasks — doing laundry, ensuring only clean laundry is aired, and sweeping the floor are tasks typically associated with housekeeping responsibilities and "women's work." Regarding sexual harassment in higher education, it's often faculty members in subordinate roles (the majority of these people identifying as women) who are taking on the role of keeping the secrets and keeping up appearances for the institution. [See also *Avoidance, A secrets code*]

Appeasement

A common response to sexual harassment. Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fischer (1995) describe appeasement as going along with the situation, or "an attempt to 'put off' the harasser without direct confrontation (e.g., humour, excuses, delaying, etc.)" (p. 120).

Appeasement can be an individual response to harassment, and an overall institutional, collective response to harassment, in that those who are harassed "grin and bear it" because they don't believe their university will support them if they come forward, or they see their university as not wanting to deal with harassment. Fearing no protection or support, and witnessing responses that "blame the victim" (e.g., assertiveness training, counseling services), the faculty response overall is to choose to keep the secrets.

[See also *Externally focused response strategies, Internally focused response strategies*]

Avoidance

The most common strategy employed in response to sexual harassment in the workplace. Examples of avoidance tactics among faculty in higher education could be: bowing out of lunch meetings, calling in sick, ensuring others are present in meetings, declining teaching assignments or service that would involve collaboration with the perpetrator or with someone who has a reputation for sexual misconduct.

In the same survey mentioned above, avoidance was identified as the main response strategy people employ: 76% of respondents reported avoiding the perpetrator, and 65% reported avoiding people with a reputation for inappropriate behavior (Angus Reid Institute, 2018, Part 3: Nine-in-ten women practice prevention strategies, para. 2; Strategies response graph).

Avoidance is also a response at the institutional level, within policies and procedures. Actions such as transferring a faculty member who has experienced sexual harassment into another department, rather than assertively dealing with the perpetrator(s), or overtly focusing on initiatives that address harassment among students while covertly sending the message that sexual harassment doesn't happen among faculty members, are examples of avoidance at the institutional level.

[See also *Externally focused response strategies, Internally focused response strategies, Whisper network*]

A secrets code

Operates to keep things (actions, situations, arrangements) secret. Regarding sexual harassment, the secrets code functions to keep those who are the target of the harassment silent, and those who harass understand that secrecy is a powerful enabler for their continued harassment. The secrets code works to maintain a status quo, or modus operandi, especially where power over is at play. Unlike a "bro code" or code of ethics, the secrets code acts to isolate individuals, rather than bring them together, and the isolation in turn strengthens the power of the secrets code.

A recent example of the secrets code in action surfaced when the news broke about a very prominent, successful, and powerful Canadian radio host being accused by several women of sexual assault. These women were involved in more than one incident with the perpetrator – in some cases, it seemed there was a relationship developing. By keeping the secret, the women were subjected to more of the same behavior. And the women were seemingly strong, determined, articulate, and intelligent. One of the more vocal women had served in the military and was herself an entertainer with some celebrity status. The thing is, and this is pointed out by Pryal (2017), "when you keep harassment to yourself like a secret shame, then you don't know who else is suffering as you are" (p. 6). Eventually one woman came forward, the secret was out, and more women spoke up.

Within a hierarchical and gender stratified institution such as higher education, those in subordinate roles – most often the targets of coercion and harassment – see themselves as the ones who need to keep the secret. Shame, embarrassment, guilt, along with many other factors, work to keep people who have been sexually harassed silent. Pryal notes the power of the secrets and believes a common corollary of keeping the secret is appeasement. People learn to smile and appease those who are abusing their power over them. They go along with things.

[See also *Appeasement, Avoidance, Disclosure, How to report sexual harassment, Externally focused response strategies, Internally focused response strategies, Power over, Structural / systemic aspects of higher education that reinforce a secrets code*]

C

Charismatic power

Operates when someone uses charm and personality to persuade others. A charismatic faculty member or leader in higher education will often appeal to the emotions of those they want to influence, and encourage them to overlook institutional procedures and approaches to situations.

[See also *Coercion*, *Power over*]

Coercion

An element often present in cases of workplace sexual harassment. Coercion involves convincing or pressing a person for desired results. Synonyms of coercion are to arm twist, pressure, convince, pester, impose one's will on another, often through the use or abuse of power. If you have been approached to become sexually involved with a colleague or boss, and you have said no to that colleague or boss more than once, *coercive power* is at play.

[See also *Charismatic power*, *Power over*]

Confidentiality

One of the biggest concerns for people who are disclosing sexual harassment. They want to be reassured that no actions or formal reporting will happen without their permission, and in most cases, this is possible. One exception to this is when the safety of the person disclosing, or the safety of others, could be compromised.

Consent

Whether sexual harassment occurs between a faculty member and a student, or between a tenured faculty member and an untenured faculty member, or between a Dean and Associate Dean, or between two faculty members of the same rank, if there is a power differential included, and/or any convincing or continued pressing or "friendly" arm twisting takes place, consent would be absent.

Consent is described in the following way in my university's policy on sexualized violence (UVic, 2017), and I have included two important qualifiers from that definition:

the voluntary agreement to engage in physical contact or sexual activity and to continue to engage in the contact or activity. Consent means that all persons involved demonstrate, through words or actions, that they freely and mutually agree to participate in a contact or activity. More specifically:

(e) there is no consent where one person abuses a position of trust, power, or authority over another person;

- (j) there is no consent when there is coercion, force, threats, or intimidation towards any person, or where there is fraud or withholding of critical information that could affect a person's decision to consent. (p. 1)

Consensual relationships can develop between faculty members and students, and tenured and untenured faculty members, and Deans and Associate Deans, and between faculty members at the same rank; however, those relationships are typically not secretive, and disclosure is an ethical response to avoid conflict of interest and ensure equity and fairness for all concerned.

[See also *Coercion, Power over*]

Crowdsource survey on sexual harassment in the academy

This online survey went live in December, 2017, and to date has garnered over 2,400 anonymous responses. The majority of respondents are graduate students who identify as women, and faculty member respondents are the minority. All who responded identified the perpetrator as someone in a power-over role, the majority of these described as male faculty members. While the nature of the data set isn't such that reliable statistics can be generated, it does provide a window into the level of sexual harassment occurring in higher education.

This survey also provides a possible form of validation for people who have not named or recognized their own uncomfortable or problem situation as one of sexual harassment. Reading about what literally thousands of other people are saying regarding their experiences of sexual harassment in higher education and seeing similarities with their own story, makes the naming of harassment possible for readers as well.

While this survey was made available to the world, a crowdsource survey could also be a strategy at individual institutions of higher education. Anonymous respondents sharing their anonymous experiences could be a powerful approach to breaking the secrets code at your university.

Kidder et al. (1995) note that when people don't name a sexually harassing situation as such, they then consider the problem as "a problem in themselves, a failure to 'see it coming,' their 'paranoia,' or their own 'fault.'" These researchers observed that, "once other people confirm that one is being harassed, then the problem of being considered paranoid vanishes" (p. 58). Have a look at the crowdsource survey and see what you think: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1S9KShDLvU7C-KkgEevYTHXr-3F6InTenrBsS9yk-8C5M/edit#>

D

Disclosure

The act of telling someone that you have been sexually harassed. This is the first step in breaking the secrets code. Disclosing doesn't mean an investigation will be undertaken or a formal report or complaint launched. From all accounts in related literature, and from various whisper networks, it's apparent that the act of disclosing, whether to a close colleague, or someone in an official capacity, provides great relief to faculty members who have experienced sexual harassment.

Often the safest person to disclose to is someone in your equity or affirmative action office, or within your faculty association office. These offices are staffed with people who can advise and support you throughout the process. Support is key, and coordinated support becomes possible once your disclosure is received. The more disclosures that come forward, the better picture your institute of higher education will have regarding levels of harassment among faculty.

If someone discloses to you, listening with empathy, asking them how you can help, and not judging are important responses outlined in my own university policy (UVic, 2017, pp. 6-7).

[See also *Confidentiality, How to report*]

E

Externally focused response strategies (Fitzgerald et al., 1995)

These responses to sexual harassment rely on sources outside of a person, and they are "problem solving in nature (e.g., 'I told him to leave me alone;' 'I reported him to the supervisor')" (p. 119). Fitzgerald et al. (1995) noted that avoidance is the most common problem-solving strategy, and this was also identified as the main strategy people employ in the 2018 Angus Reid Institute survey, wherein 76% of respondents reported avoiding the perpetrator, and 65% reported avoiding people with a reputation for inappropriate behaviour. Other externally focused response strategies include appeasement, assertion, seeking institutional organizational relief, and seeking social support (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

[See also *Appeasement, Avoidance, Disclosure, How to report, Internally focused response strategies, Whisper network*]

F

Fear

Fear of not being believed; of retribution or retaliation, resulting in negative career outcomes; of being labeled a troublemaker; and/or inaction on the part of management are the most common reasons people give for not reporting sexual harassment in the workplace (Angus Reid Institute, 2014; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; H. Hallgrímsdóttir, personal communication, March 27, 2018; Kidder et al., 1995).

G

Gender discrimination

A complicated and challenging dimension, closely related to sexual harassment. Gender discrimination is systemic within higher education so much so that faculty members often don't notice the resulting inequities related to gendered identities.

An example of systemic gender discrimination (and perhaps even, gender harassment) can be seen in the composition of university level committees, often chaired by upper administration (Associate Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents), for example a Research Advisory Committee. Membership on these committees is often by appointment, and these committees are often composed of a majority of faculty members who identify as men, and faculty who identify as women make up the minority. Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, President, UVic Faculty Association, notes that when gender is a marker in terms of committee composition, especially the "power committees" and when such service has career implications: merit, promotions, work with graduate students, input into research priorities at a university; it's difficult *not* to name gender discrimination as contributing to systemic indifference towards sexualized violence (H. Hallgrímsdóttir, personal communication, March 27, 2018).

[See also *Power over*]

H

How 'bout a hug?

While some hugs come at you without any permission, even making this request is not always appropriate when it's coming from a colleague and/or someone you report to. You don't have to hug anyone you don't want to hug, especially in the workplace. Examples of responses: "Oh, I'm more of a hand-shaker." Or, "I'm more comfortable shaking hands." Or, "No."

[See also *Charismatic power, Coercion, You don't have to be nice*]

How to report sexual harassment

The first step is to disclose to someone. Formal reporting is not always initiated from a disclosure, and reporting takes different forms and routes at each institute of higher education. Various options will be available to you, depending on your institution, and in most cases, coordination between union collective agreements and sexual violence prevention policies will determine the exact route for each situation.

[See also *Confidentiality, Disclosure*]

I

I don't want a scandal

A reason someone could give to a subordinate to maintain a coercive / harassing situation. Other similar statements: "This isn't a good time to draw attention to this." "What about your tenure / promotion / reference / merit pay?" "But you got involved didn't you?" "I'm asking you not to tell others."

[See also *Coercion*]

I don't want you to think I'm harassing you

If someone has to say this, it doesn't mean harassment isn't happening, in fact, it's more likely the case that sexual harassment is occurring. Oh, and no one decides for you what you think. You're the boss of what you think.

If it's not about our work, I don't want to talk about it

This should be all a person needs to say to end any talk of a sexual nature in the workplace. If the talk doesn't end, or emails and texts continue to focus on things of a sexual nature (e.g., "I don't know how to be around you because I'm so attracted to you" or, "I think about you all the time"), this is sexual harassment, and already a secret to not keep.

Internally focused response strategies (Fitzgerald et al., 1995)

These are strategies that a person has some control over. Internally focused strategies are "characterized by attempts to manage thoughts and emotions associated with a sexually harassing event / condition (e.g., 'I just tried to forget about it; 'I told myself he didn't mean to upset me')" (p. 119). Denial is a common internally focused response strategy. Endurance is a strategy linked with denial, and in this response strategy, people who are targeted choose to "ignore the harassment and do nothing or pretend that the situation is not happening or has no effect" (p. 119). Detachment, reinterpreting the situation so that it's not defined as sexual harassment, and self-blame are other internally focused response strategies (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

[See also *Externally focused response strategies*]

I wasn't really sure if it was sexual harassment

This is what many people say when they disclose sexual harassment. Leah Shumka, Sexualized Violence Prevention and Education Co-ordinator at the University of Victoria, notes the prevalence of this comment in her work with people who disclose sexual harassment, and also within generalized conversations about sexualized violence (L. Shumka, personal communication, March 22, 2018).

While sexual harassment is a form of sexualized violence, it's a form of violation that may not involve physical contact. It's an action that is more difficult to determine than say, sexual assault. Kidder et al. (1995) also noted this comment is a common reason, given by those who have been sexually harassed, for not coming forward sooner, or even at all.

[See also *Sexualized violence, Sexual misconduct, Sexual harassment, Signs that what you're experiencing is sexual harassment and/or coercion*]

J

Just an affair gone wrong

This has sometimes been the response or narrative trope assigned to a situation wherein a faculty member discloses sexual harassment or coerced involvement with someone who has power over. While consensual relationships do develop between colleagues in a workplace, consent is always suspect when there is a power differential. Some policy documents in higher education include statements regarding this caveat.

In a publicized case at Harvard University (Bartlett & Gluckman, 2018), wherein a subordinate faculty member reported another more established and senior faculty member for sexual harassment, the narrative became one of an affair gone wrong, thus discouraging others from also reporting (in this case, reporting the same perpetrator), as they feared the stigma of being labeled angry or jealous, and having others lose respect for their scholarly expertise.

[See also *Charismatic power, Coercion, Consent, Power over*]

L

Living out loud

If you are involved in a workplace relationship that has to be kept a secret, and you're not comfortable with that secret, don't waste any time wondering if you should tell someone. Tell someone. We all deserve to live out loud, unencumbered in our professional lives.

[See also *Disclosure, How to report*]

M

Missing in action

If you're missing work, calling in sick, or cancelling commitments that involve interaction with someone you report to, or if you notice this behavior on the part of a colleague, this behavior could be a sign of avoidance, a common response to sexual harassment.

[See also *Avoidance*, *Externally focused response strategies*, *Internally focused response strategies*].

P

Personal harassment

Often linked to sexual harassment, and in higher education settings, where power differentials are prevalent, and again referencing my own institutional policy definition, personal harassment "must either abuse the power one person holds over another or misuse authority or constitute a pattern of mistreatment" (UVic, 2015, p. 2).

Power over

A complex, multifaceted condition. When someone holds the direct or indirect possibility of making a determination that affects your career outcomes (salary, merit, tenure, promotion, reference letters, granting awards, etc.), that is power over. Typical examples of power over arrangements among faculty in higher education: tenured faculty member / untenured faculty member, department chair / department member, department chair / assistant to the chair, tenured faculty member / sessional instructor, Dean / development officer, Dean / faculty member, Dean / Associate Dean, Dean/Administrative Officer, Provost / Dean, President / Provost, etc.

Intersectionality is an important factor at play within power over situations. Even two faculty members of the same rank can be influenced by power over, as conditions such as gender, "socio-economic status, age, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, and employment status can leave some people more vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence" (Benoit, Shumka, Phillips, Kennedy, & Belle-Isle, 2015, p. 10).

[See also *Charismatic power*, *Coercion*]

S

Sexual harassment

As Levy (2018) reminds us, the term *sexual harassment* is a recent addition to our cultural lexicon, with etymology linked to “the French *harasser*, ‘to tire or... spend or weaken, wearie or weare out.’ The aim is clear: to devastate through repeated attacks. It is meant to intimidate, exhaust, weary, and weaken. It does” (p. 6). Sexual harassment is identified as a form of sexualized violence, and a definition of sexual harassment, taken from a policy document at my own institution of higher education (UVic, 2015) is “behaviour of a sexual nature by a person:

- a. who knows or ought reasonably to know that the behaviour is unwanted or unwelcome; *and*
- b. leads to or implies job or academically related consequences for the person harassed; *or*
- c. would be viewed by a reasonable person experiencing the behaviour as an interference with that person’s participation in a University-Related Activity or creating an intimidating, humiliating or hostile environment.” (p.2)

Sexual misconduct

An umbrella term that refers to “any of the acts or behaviours identified in the definition of sexualized violence” (UVic, 2017, p. 2).

Sexualized violence

A term used to encompass a number of violations, including sexual harassment. My own institution of higher education has adopted this term to encompass

sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, the distribution of sexually explicit photographs or videos of a person...without consent.... Sexual violence can take place through any form or means of communication (e.g., online, social media, verbal, written, visual, through a third party, etc.). (UVic, 2017, p. 3).

Signs that what you’re experiencing is sexual harassment and/or coercion

While it’s easier to tell if something is harassment in your personal life or when out in public, it’s more difficult to name it when it’s behavior coming from a colleague and/or someone you report to in your workplace. Formal definitions can help you determine and name your situation. It’s also helpful to keep in mind that statistically, one in two people who identify as women, and one in five people who identify as men face sexual harassment in the workplace (Angus Reid Institute, 2018). And a common response is to deny or refuse to name the behavior as sexual harassment. (So, maybe you didn’t actually take your boss’s comments the wrong way.)

[See also *Trust your gut*]

Structural / systemic aspects of higher education that reinforce a “secrets code” among faculty

The following are examples of structural / systemic aspects of higher education that reinforce a “secrets code” among faculty: 1) Universities taking a reactive rather than proactive approach to sexual harassment, for example, focusing on individual instances rather than considering the systemic conditions and overall climate that enables sexual harassment. Individualizing the problem could look like making accommodations for those who have been targets of sexual harassment (medical leaves, counseling services, transferring faculty appointments to other departments) rather than setting tangible career consequences for perpetrators. 2) Covertly assigning “trouble-maker” status to people who come forward with sexual harassment complaints (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; H. Hallgrímsdóttir, personal communication, March 27, 2018). 3) Sexualized violence policies that focus on students as the assumed constituents affected by sexualized violence. Shame, taboo, and stigma are amplified when faculty members don’t see themselves explicitly included as possible targets in sexualized violence policies, or when education initiatives focus on students only. 4) Faculty members have highly specialized knowledge and skills that don’t easily transfer to employment outside of higher education. Reporting / disclosing sexual harassment often means staying in the same job, working with the perpetrator until retirement; thus keeping the secret can seem to be the least disruptive option (H. Hallgrímsdóttir, personal communication, March 27, 2018).

[See also *A secrets code*]

T

Tell everyone

Ann-Marie MacDonald, established and award-winning author, actor, broadcaster, and playwright, issued a challenge regarding changing the way silences around sexual harassment and coercion are maintained (MacDonald, 2018). She urges people who have been targeted with sexual harassment in the workplace to “tell everyone” (p. A3). McDonald maintains that it’s the secrets that allow the toxicity of sexual harassment to remain.

In a recent workplace harassment case (Leeder, 2018), the complainant is speaking out rather than keeping a secret, “because staying silent, she said, has left her with feelings of shame. ‘I’m not telling any lies. Keeping their secret makes me feel like I did something wrong. And I didn’t’” (p. A16).

Trust your gut

This adage works when it comes to sexual harassment. If you’re feeling uncomfortable or your spidey senses tell you something isn’t good regarding a workplace relationship that’s starting to feel too intimate for you, or you continue to receive comments from a colleague that you would be embarrassed to tell others about, that’s a probable sign of sexual harassment.

W

We could just share the room. We wouldn't have to sleep together

Whether couched in the language of fiscal restraint, workplace “team” loyalty, the cool, avant-garde thing to do, or just plain old propositioning, perhaps, at a conference, a Department Chair might say this to a tenured or untenured department member. Or a President might say this to a Provost, or a Dean might say this to a faculty member, or a principal investigator might say this to a member of the research team. It’s a phrase that changes the collegial relationship to include a level of intimacy that is not about work. Things move from professional to personal. If someone hears this or a similarly focused phrase, and feels uncomfortable (even while at the same time feeling flattered or embarrassed or annoyed for being singled out), it’s a sign of sexual harassment. A simple answer to the above proposition could be “No, I don’t want to share a room with you.” There’s no obligation to frame a response in niceties.

[See also *Charismatic power, Coercion, Power over, You don't have to be nice*]

Whisper campaign

A campaign that is most often initiated by someone (the perpetrator) who has power over a person who has refused a coercive and harassing sexual situation or who has confronted the perpetrator. The perpetrator shares information or makes disparaging comments about the person who has refused the coercive situation, with the aim of retaliation or retribution. A whisper campaign has negative career consequences for people who don’t go along with things, such as: lowered merit points, difficult promotions, being overlooked for professional development opportunities, publications, etc.

One way the target of a whisper campaign can discourage further whispering is to disclose the harassment, and along with that disclosure, launch a complaint. Complaint procedures usually include clauses barring retaliation or retribution.

[See also *Disclosure, How to report*]

Whisper network

A form of social support that operates under the radar with the goal of thwarting further experiences of sexual harassment. It’s a network of faculty who share information about colleagues and/or those with power-over who are known for sexual harassment in the workplace.

Workplace bullying

This is behavior that can enable sexual harassment, e.g., a workplace climate that promotes an attitude of “toughen up” or “what’s the matter, can’t you take it?” in harassing situations.

Y

You don't have to be nice

It's not rude to tell a more senior colleague or the person you report to or someone who has a form of power over you, that you aren't comfortable meeting for coffee / lunch / drinks. Or that you prefer not to discuss your research with him/her. Or that you need him/her to leave your office. Now.

You wear those jeans / your age / that dress really well

A comment that requires a strategic response. While the comment may have been intended as a compliment, when it comes attached to how your body looks or how you look, rather than how the jeans look, it could cause uncomfortable feelings. Possible responses could be: "I'm not comfortable with that comment." Or, "How I wear my jeans / my age / my dress has nothing to do with my expertise and how I conduct my work in the department." These examples aren't rude responses, they are professional and they set a boundary.

[See also *You don't have to be nice*]

NOTES

1. Many thanks to Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, President, Faculty Association, and Leah Shumka, Sexualized Violence Prevention and Education Co-ordinator, both at the University of Victoria, for their time, expertise, and guidance as I worked to compile this glossary.

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