

**Centre for Feminist Research, Goldsmiths, University of London:  
Submission to Universities UK violence against women, harassment and hate crime taskforce**

**Submitted on behalf the Centre for Feminist Research by:**

Professor Sara Ahmed  
Professor Heidi Mirza  
Dr Alison Phipps  
Dr Anna Bull  
Dr Leila Whitley  
Tiffany Page  
Heidi Hasbrouck  
Alice Corble

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the taskforce on violence against women, harassment and hate crime. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss further the issues raised in this document.

**About the Centre for Feminist Research at Goldsmiths, University of London**

The Centre (CFR) is currently based in the Media & Communications and Sociology Departments at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is directed by Professor Sara Ahmed. The Centre also has members in Anthropology, Art, Computing, Educational Studies, English & Comparative Literature, History, Music, Visual Cultures, and Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies. The CFR provides a coordinating hub for feminist work at Goldsmiths. We organise conferences and seminars, provide a forum for discussion of equality and diversity issues on campus (in relation to all aspects of the College's equality policy: race and religion, gender, sexuality, disability and widening participation) and provide an intellectual context for the delivery of Goldsmiths' equality policy.

**Submission on Staff to Student Sexual Harassment**

This submission focuses on staff to student sexual harassment and sexual violence in higher education. As we will outline, the sexual harassment of students by academic staff members is not adequately addressed within an approach that focuses on student-to-student harassment and needs to be examined separately. This submission draws on talks and discussions from a recent conference organised on this topic at the Centre for Feminist Research at Goldsmiths, University of London.<sup>1</sup> The presentations from this conference are included in the appendix to this submission. Recommendations are listed at the end of this document.

The impetus for organising an academic conference on staff to student harassment was due to our continued involvement in a number of serious cases of sexual harassment of female students by male academic staff members that involved multiple students over the course of a number of years at several UK academic institutions. The lack of policy, appropriate complaint procedures, and insufficiency of institutional responses to employees who commit sexual harassment has led to our continued action in this area.

<sup>1</sup> Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Conference, held at Goldsmiths, University of London on 2 December 2015. For details please see: <https://shhegoldsmiths.wordpress.com>.

In our work on this issue, we have found that white, cis-gendered experiences are often centred within discussions of sexual harassment. There are important differences in how sexual harassment impacts Black and minority ethnic students, and students who are trans\*, non-binary or queer, in both the experience of and reporting rates of harassment. Students are unlikely to talk to members of staff about the sexual harassment they have experienced if they do not feel comfortable or safe to do so, or believe that they may be at risk of forms of retribution or bullying, either from the staff member or from other students. We have witnessed incidents where this has occurred. The impact of sexual harassment is compounded by racism, homophobia, Islamophobia and transphobia, and intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as the exploitation of students with disabilities and mental health vulnerabilities, and targeted harassment of students who are sex workers. There is a need for an account of sexual harassment that occurs within higher education that does not treat all students as the same, and which attends to the differentiated ways that students are abused by abuses of power. Based on the cases we have been involved, we propose that there is a direct connection between the experience of sexual harassment and levels of attrition from postgraduate courses. This is an issue both in its own right, and also in relation to universities' responsibilities as public bodies to provide equal access to education regardless of gender, under the public sector equality duty and the Human Rights Act (EVAW 2015).

**What evidence (including data, survey findings) do you have in relation to incidents of violence, harassment and hate crime occurring at UK higher education institutions or affecting higher education students in the UK?**

In the process of organising an event on sexual harassment of students by academic staff, we have found a lack of research and expertise in this area. We therefore recommend that priority be given to commissioning research in this area. In the US, a [recent large-scale survey](#) of students' experiences of sexual harassment carried out by the Association of American Universities (AAU) collated responses from 150,072 students across 27 US universities (AAU 2015). This study found that graduate students were three times as vulnerable to harassment by supervisors, teachers or advisors than undergraduate students. Nearly one in six (15.8%) female graduate students had experienced sexual harassment from a teacher or advisor. It is reasonable to argue from these findings that the prevalence would be similar in the UK but in the absence of any data this cannot be stated with any certainty.

It is worth noting the lack of more recent UK based studies of sexual harassment of students by staff members despite the fact that there is much anecdotal evidence of many cases across diverse organisations. This lack of study might reflect the nature of the specific problem: when formal complaints are made, cases tend to be resolved internally within organisations, which often involves the signing of confidentiality agreements. As a result there is no public disclosure or record of these cases; nor are they ever discussed in media sources. We will return to this issue when discussing complaints procedures.

Here we summarise the few studies that have been conducted in the UK. The most recent of these studies and articles occurred in 1999, highlighting the need for research to be conducted within the current environment of higher education. Pam Carter and Tony Jeffs (1995) conducted a study on 'sexual exploitation in higher education'. They described 'sexual exploitation' as 'the use by a lecturer of his position of trust and power to secure sexual gratification'. This was a mixed methods study involving interviews with students, staff, counsellors and equal opportunities officers in Britain and the USA; analysis of policy documents; and a postal survey of British universities examining their responses to sexual exploitation of students. They found solely instances of male perpetrators, in a recurring pattern where lecturers would target a different student every year. The study is particularly helpful in documenting the difficulties that bystanders such as other staff members face when trying to make a complaint about a colleague, difficulties that anecdotal evidence suggests are still present today; it appears that staff-student sexual harassment often occurs in public and is tacitly condoned by the academic community. Our own

experience provides evidence to support this finding. In two further studies, Deborah Lee (1999) has written directly on experiences of sexual harassment in PhD supervision in the UK and the conditions in which supervisory relationships occur. Lee points to the lack of training of supervisors and students in how to manage the professional relationship, and inherent power relations between staff and students. Barbara Bagilhole and Hazel Woodward (1995) conducted a qualitative survey of female academics in a UK university and found that over 25% had experienced sexual harassment from predominately male academic staff, but also male students. A further 40% stated they had not experienced sexual harassment but described incidents that may be considered harassment within particular definitions of the term. Bagilhole and Woodward describe in the detail the kinds of behaviour that their participants were subjected to while being employed within a UK university. None of the incidents described were reported or made the subject of official complaints.

Anecdotal evidence of staff-to-student sexual harassment and violence in the UK today is collated on the [Strategic Misogyny](#) blog, which was initiated in 2013 by members of the Goldsmiths Feminist Postgraduate Forum. This site contains the anonymous stories of women who have experienced sexual harassment from academic staff members. While these accounts do not provide quantitative data, the anonymity of the site allows students to document experiences of harassment and sexual violence that they may not have disclosed to their institution. This is helpful as it contributes towards an understanding of how this harassment and sexual violence occurs, and the effects on those who experience it. For example, the accounts on this site, as well as the analysis from Whitley and Page (2015) document the often subtle and varied forms in which harassment occurs leading to difficulties in naming the behaviour, the ways in which students' and junior academics' rely on their supervisors and senior colleagues, and how grades, references, progression to further study, obtaining teaching and other work opportunities, and getting the teaching a student is entitled to, are all at risk when an academic staff member harasses a student and when students reject sexual advances.

The predominance of men in positions of power in universities is likely to contribute to an environment where sexual harassment and violence occur. The World Health Organisation notes that promoting gender equality is a critical part of preventing violence against women (WHO 2009). Data from 2013-14 shows that only 22% of professors in the UK are female and only a third of senior academic staff, excluding professors, are women. On the other hand, 82% of clerical staff are female (HESA 2015). This suggests that programmes like Athena Swan, if they lead to meaningful changes in culture and practice, are important for combating harassment, but must directly address the specificities of harassment within their remit. The Women in Philosophy report also links gender inequality within philosophy in higher education to sexual harassment (Beebee and Saul, 2011).

The effects of staff-to-student harassment and vulnerability are compounded for those whose position in the university is more marginalised because they are (for example) a person of colour, trans\*, queer or non-binary, or working class (Loveday, 2015; Reay et al., 2010), but research data on this is similarly lacking. The new Race Equality Charter may help to in combating such discrimination (ECU, 2016) but training and research (as outlined below) need to address these issues specifically.

**How effective have the responses of higher education institutions been in addressing these issues (highlighting examples of both good and bad practice)?**

**In your view what components are necessary to ensure that higher education institutions are able to (a) prevent incidents on the basis of race, religion and belief and (b) respond effectively should they occur?**

**Please include any relevant points such as awareness raising, setting behavioural expectations, support for affected students and alleged perpetrators, promotion of policies and procedures including reporting**

## **mechanisms etc.**

Staff-to-student sexual harassment and sexual violence has not been addressed by UK HEIs. However, it is important to note that the AAU study from the US shows wide variation between institutions in the prevalence of sexual harassment (AAU, 2015). This suggests that the culture and practices of an institution do make a difference. These variations in culture and practice include institutional policies and procedures; how policies are publicised and put into practice; and support for students who need to make complaints.

### **In the UK:**

King's College London is running the 'It Stops Here' campaign

<http://blogs.kcl.ac.uk/itstopshere/about/>

This is the staff-student relationships policy from Kings, which could be used as an example of clearer, stronger wording by institutions:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/philosophy/study/handbook/resources-links/Staffstudent-relationships-finalmarch13.pdf>

### **In the US:**

One of the most highest profile incidences in the last couple of years of a culture of sexual harassment within a university department has been at the Philosophy department at University of Colorado, where an external investigation made public a report by the American Philosophical Association's Committee on the status of Women Site Visit Program. This report stated that pervasive sexual harassment and bullying was occurring in the Philosophy department.

The full report can be read here:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/203684450/American-Philosophical-Association-s-Committee-on-the-Status-of-Women-report-on-CU-Boulder-philosophy-department>

University of Colorado new best practice commitments are here:

[http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/climate\\_practices.shtml](http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/climate_practices.shtml)

A summary of the changes the university has made:

- Established a climate committee to do periodic surveys of the department
- Closed admissions to the department while they addressed these problems
- Required faculty to attend a two-day retreat with an external facilitator expert in issues of conflict resolution and problems in academic administration to formulate informal resolutions and goals
- Developed new best practices representing the ideals and goals they hope to live up to through the climate committee working in collaboration with undergraduate and graduate students
- Created a climate section on their website to serve as an information resource for department members

### *Institutional policies and procedures*

Institutional policies appear to vary widely in this area. While a few institutions, such as [Harvard and Yale Universities](#) in the US, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in the UK, have banned all sexual relationships between staff and students, this appears to be an unusual policy in the UK.

Institutional policies need to be carefully written to consider the effects that they might have on students who need support, and must build on and enhance other equality policies and institutional strategies. They also need to be implemented alongside strategies that actively create an institutional culture that supports

students. Some institutions still have a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy in relation to student relationships with staff, which leaves students highly vulnerable. Rather, institutional policies need to strengthen students' position, and send a clear message that students will be believed and supported if they need to make a complaint to the institution (Carter and Jeffs 1995).

It is important to recognise that the vast majority (85%) of those who experience sexual violence never report their experiences to the police and 28% never disclose to anyone at all (Ministry of Justice et al., 2013). Therefore, complaints procedures need to be highly visible, transparent, and easy to carry out. The NUS investigating universities' policies on lad culture and harassment, found a wide variation in the visibility and levels of awareness of sexual harassment policies across HEIs (National Union of Students, 2015).

Sexual harassment reporting in the UK tends to be dealt with through a complaints procedure. This procedure requires the student to make a named complaint against their harasser. In many instances, this complaint is then forwarded to the harasser (who is in a position of authority over the student) and to the head of department (who may also be complicit in the harassment). This represents a serious conflict of interest for those who receive the complaints, as well as a serious impediment to the naming of sexual harassment by students. In our experience, and as Lawton (1999) suggests, "...there is anecdotal evidence that institutions may not be recording all complaints or reports of sexual harassment. ...There need to be formal procedures for record-keeping of such reports and clear procedure in place for reporting incidents."

Furthermore, current practices that involve dealing with complaints on a case-by-case basis, where one individual has to complain about another individual, serve to obscure institutional cultures where harassment may have become normalised by treating it as an irregularity or as a pathology. This places enormous pressure on individuals to make complaints, and in doing so do it places their careers and personal lives at great risk. Currently, when sexual harassment is formally recognised, the institution treats the problem as a problem of an individual aggressor. This is often built into the structure of the complaints process. However, it can be difficult to locate the source of the problem as a single individual. In order for this harassment to remain in place, any number of other individuals must enable and tolerate it, and therefore be complicit in producing and sustaining an environment that accepts this behaviour. Therefore institutional culture plays a critical role in supporting, maintaining, and hiding sexual harassment.

Therefore we recommend that institutional best practice guidelines be developed, through research into best and worst practices. This may need to include the restructuring of complaints procedures in relation to sexual harassment. For example, if two or more complaints are received about a particular department, then an investigation could be launched into that department rather than simply investigating each complaint in isolation. A further possibility is to introduce anonymous reporting of sexual harassment. This has been implemented by the University of Manchester to address student-to-student harassment but it could be an important mechanism for dealing with staff-to-student harassment. This will allow tracking of departments where there are high incidence rates.

Furthermore, there is anecdotal evidence that institutions may not be recording all complaints or reports of sexual harassment. Disclosure of harassment may be made to heads of department, student services, academic tutors or supervisors, or other university staff members. There should be formal procedures for record keeping of such reports and a clear procedure in place for reporting incidents. Attrition data also needs to be examined in conjunction with complaints of sexual harassment in order to identify departments or areas where there are high rates of both. These factors should be taken into account by the QAA (or their successor body) in their reports on universities. Currently, the QAA does not appear to have a high level of awareness of staff-to-student sexual harassment, for example, that high levels of attrition or non-completion among graduate students may indicate a problem with sexual harassment.

A further area to address in relation to this issue is disciplinary procedures for academic staff. Discussions that occurred at the academic conference we organised on sexual harassment suggested that in many institutions, general disciplinary procedures and processes are currently unable to deal explicitly with the complexity of sexual harassment complaints. The best practice guidelines in this area should therefore address disciplinary processes and suggest ways to simplify these where possible.

Finally, many universities in recent years have taken a very cautionary approach to investigating any allegations made by students. It has come to light that this may be a result of the Zellick guidelines, published in 1994, which are now outdated. We would like to strongly encourage the taskforce to communicate to the sector that these guidelines are outdated, and provide clear, up to date guidelines for universities.

### *Code of conduct*

As well as policies, professional codes of conduct can make expectations clear. Other professional bodies such as therapists or health professionals are required to adhere to a code of conduct; for example, the [General Medical Council](#) specifies that sexual relationships and indecent behaviour towards patients is unethical<sup>2</sup>, and that members are expected to report colleagues who breach these guidelines<sup>3</sup>. These guidelines clearly state that 'serious or persistent failure to follow this guidance will put your registration at risk.' Such guidelines on professional boundaries are lacking for academic staff. In the absence of a professional registration body such as the General Medical Council, it would be appropriate for Universities UK to take the lead on consulting on the likely efficacy of this policy, and developing and implementing an appropriate code of conduct.

Currently existing codes of conduct for romantic/sexual relationships between staff and students are inadequate. The inadequacy of these policies, often described as conflict of interest policies, prevents students from revealing harassment that results from these relationships. This can be evidenced by the following clause, drawn from the *Goldsmiths Conflict of Interest policy*, however the same or similar wording can be found in HE policies across the UK. In the appendix, we attach a documentation of uses and variation of this policy phrasing at universities across the UK. Policies that utilise such language provide evidence as to how policies can actually enable and legitimise the abuse of power by making sexual relations between staff and students a private matter – or about personal ethics – and one that has nothing to do with the organisation as an employer of academic staff.

“The College values good professional relationships between staff and students. These relationships are heavily reliant upon mutual trust and confidence, and can be jeopardised when a member of staff enters a sexual/romantic liaison with a student. At the extreme, these liaisons can jeopardise professional relationships and can result in an abuse of power. Problems can also occur when a consensual relationship later becomes non-consensual or a case of harassment. The College does not wish to prevent, or even necessarily be aware of, liaisons between staff and students and it relies upon the integrity of both parties to ensure that abuses of power do not occur.”

There are few cases of academic staff members who sexually harass students having their employment terminated. Current disciplinary proceedings are inadequate in dealing with cases of harassment, and in our experience such cases require evidence of further misconduct (such as not fulfilling the requirements of an academic position) for the academic to be suspended and their employment terminated. An academic accused of harassment can resign at any stage of the investigation or disciplinary proceedings. This

2 [http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical\\_guidance/21170.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/21170.asp) [accessed 19 January 2016]

3 [http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical\\_guidance/21185.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/21185.asp) [accessed 19 January 2016]

presents a risk to students at other institutions where the academic may subsequently become employed. In our experience there is often no record of harassment on employment files, and no communication between academic institutions on this issue.

### *Support for students*

Students who make complaints of sexual harassment are not receiving adequate support from their institutions. As a result, these students risk losing access to teaching and academic resources and support. Institutions need to ensure that academic support and services can be accessed through other channels when sexual harassment complaints are made. Support for students includes having the appropriate members of staff available to talk to, and for students to feel safe in discussing their experience and with the assurance of confidentiality. For example there are very few female Muslim staff and pastoral advisors in universities for Muslim women to go to and feel safe to talk. Shame and honour (izzat) is a powerful inhibitor to reporting sexual harassment, particularly in close knit conservative religious communities. Sensitivity and clarity in procedure and support services is vital.

### *Training and the raising of awareness*

Policies can easily be sidelined or dismissed if they exist within an institutional culture that lacks leadership from committed and trained senior staff. There is currently no training that we are aware of that covers staff to student harassment. We recommend that training is developed and delivered to all postgraduate students, academic and support staff who deal with postgraduate students, HR staff, and most importantly, representatives from senior leadership within HEIs. This needs to take place alongside rewriting of policies and publicising such policies within institutions.

While some aspects of this training are similar to training required for student to student harassment training, there are distinctive patterns to staff to student harassment that need to be addressed. In particular, recognising harassment, bystander interventions, and complaints procedures are likely to be different for staff to student harassment. In addition, it may not be recognised as such by those experiencing it. Harassment behaviours such as an academic supervisor or tutor setting up meetings at his house in the evenings, or asking questions about a student's sexual behaviour, are typical forms of harassment which contribute towards an atmosphere where a student is sexualised and academic supervisions are turned into dates. However, students may not recognise or label such behaviours as harassment, as their cumulative effect may not become apparent until after the fact. Training should therefore include:

- What is sexual harassment
- How to respond to disclosures of harassment
- How to intervene when you witness sexual harassment
- How to report sexual harassment within your institution
- Institutional responsibilities towards those who report sexual harassment
- Developing policies and disciplinary and complaint procedures to address sexual harassment

### *Perpetrators moving between institutions*

An issue specific to staff to student harassment is that of serial harassers moving between institutions. As Carter and Jeffs (1995) found, it was common for perpetrators of sexual harassment in higher education to be serial offenders. When an academic who sexually harasses students resigns or leaves an institution, the academic moves on to a new institution, and students at that university have no knowledge of the abusive behaviour of their new supervisor, their new lecturer. This problem needs to be addressed in best practice

guidelines and case study research (see recommendations).

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. Research**

A national survey should be carried out, following the model of the AAU study, to explore the prevalence and effects of sexual harassment and sexual violence between academic staff and students. This needs to be complemented by case study research into best and worst practices within particular institutions, which will explore how institutional policies, reporting, complaints procedures, training, and support for students experiencing this form of harassment, should best be carried out. This research should draw on practices, policies and procedures on workplace harassment from other sectors.

This research will have to take into account the difficulty of reporting staff to student harassment for those students who have been affected. In our experience, if the investigator does not establish trust with the students who are interviewed, students may choose not to disclose their experiences. This may result in the research being unable to reveal the harassment that occurs. As in many instances of sexual violence, lack of reporting does not necessarily mean lack of incidence, but can instead point to inadequate interview and survey mechanisms.

### **2. Best practice guidelines developed and communicated to the sector**

This research will feed into the formulation of best practice guidelines. These need to examine:

- How complaints procedures operate, including the possibility for anonymous reporting
- Record-keeping of reports of harassment
- How to support students who report harassment
- How to develop disciplinary processes for academic staff that can deal with complaints of sexual harassment
- Investigative procedures

These guidelines need to be communicated to the sector via regional events for university staff as well as through a permanent and active web presence.

With regards to best practices for investigative procedures, we support the approach recommended by Paludi and DeFour (1988):

Procedures for investigating complaints of sexual harassment must take into account the psychological issues involved in the victimization process, including individuals' feelings of powerlessness, isolation, changes in social network patterns, and wish to gain control over their personal and professional lives. These procedures must be confidential. Students must believe that once a complaint is filed, it will not become the subject of campus gossip. The procedures should maintain secrecy, and students should be made aware of this. Students should also be assured that complaints will be taken seriously and that an investigation will be undertaken promptly by an individual trained to handle such situations. Students will always feel more encouraged to become involved in a process when they understand fully what the process entails. Fear of the unknown can discourage reporting (p.200 – 201).

### **3. QAA.**



The lack of awareness of issues of staff to student harassment means that the problem of attrition in postgraduate students is likely to be overlooked by QAA reports. Consultation and training needs to be made available to the QAA (or their successor body) in order to alert their inspectors to be able to recognise where staff to student harassment may be occurring.

#### **4. Code of conduct.**

UUK should consult with the NUS, UCU, and other professional bodies representing academic staff on the possibilities for designing a code of conduct for academic teaching staff. This should involve a timely process to address the short time frame of certain course enrolments (for example one year Masters programmes). It would enable teaching staff to be investigated as a result of a complaint of sexual harassment and for other universities to be informed of, and inquire with regards to any case in which a charge of sexual harassment that has been upheld, in order to begin to address the problem of serial harassers moving between institutions. This is also designed to combat the lack of political will to address this issue on the level of individual institutions. This could be implemented on a statutory level via the reforms around the Teaching Excellence Framework and the proposed Office for Students.

As part of research and record keeping university best practice, this could include institutions having to submit annual figures/reports to a central body that includes: how many complaints were made, and of the complaints made, how long each complaint took to resolve and what form the resolution took (departmental investigations, employment termination, resignations etc). Issues of confidentiality could be addressed by reporting numbers without department names or names of perpetrators. Instead it would focus on institutional capability in addressing harassment.

#### **5. Zellick guidelines**

These guidelines are outdated. Clear, up-to-date guidelines for universities on their responsibility to investigate complaints of sexual harassment and sexual violence need to be provided by UUK.

#### **6. Training**

Funding needs to be made available to develop, pilot, and implement training for all academic and support staff who deal with postgraduate students, the students themselves, and senior leadership within institutions. There is the potential for this training to be developed by the Centre for Feminist Research with input from specialist services including the Intervention Initiative programme, End Violence Against Women, Rape Crisis, and UUK.

To support this requirement for training, Paludi and DeFour (1988) note:

The most important feature of an effective policy statement on sexual harassment for college campuses is the training programs designed to implement this policy... Effective training programs send a clear message to all individuals that the sexual harassment policy must be taken seriously and that sexual harassment will not be tolerated by the campus administrators. Successful training programs are mandatory and held annually and have the active support and participation of the college president (p.201).

#### **References**

Association of American Universities, 2015. 'AAU Campus Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct'. Accessed October 23 2015. <http://www.aau.edu/Climate-Survey.aspx?id=16525>.

Bagilhole, Barbara & Woodward, Hazel (1995) 'An Occupational Hazard Warning: Academic Life Can Seriously Damage Your Health. An Investigation of Sexual Harassment of Women Academics in a UK University' in *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1995), pp. 37-51, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Beebee, Helen, and Jenny Saul, 2011. 'Women in Philosophy in the UK. A report by the British Philosophical Association and the Society for Women in Philosophy UK'.  
[http://www.bpa.ac.uk/uploads/2011/02/BPA\\_Report\\_Women\\_In\\_Philosophy.pdf](http://www.bpa.ac.uk/uploads/2011/02/BPA_Report_Women_In_Philosophy.pdf) [accessed 20 January 2016]

Carter, Pam, and Tony Jeffs. 1995. *A Very Private Affair: Sexual Exploitation in Higher Education*. Ticknall: Education Now Books.

End Violence Against Women Coalition. 2015. 'Spotted: Obligations to Protect Women Students' Safety & Equality'. <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/70/Spotted-Obligations-to-Protect-Women-StudentsEy-Safety-Equality.pdf> Accessed 20 January 2016.

HESA (2015). *Staff in Higher Education 2013-14* <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/stats-staff> Accessed 20 January 2016.

Lawton, Anne (1999) "The Emperor's New Clothes: How the Academy Deals With Sexual Harassment," *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 5. Available at:  
<http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol11/iss1/5>

Lee, Deborah (1998) 'Sexual Harassment in PhD Supervision' in *Gender and Education*, 10:3, 299-312, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Loveday, Vik. 2015. 'Embodying Deficiency Through "Affective Practice": Shame, Relationality, and the Lived Experience of Social Class and Gender in Higher Education'. *Sociology*, June, 0038038515589301. doi:10.1177/0038038515589301.

Ministry of Justice, Home Office, and Office for National Statistics. 2013. 'An Overview of Sexual Offending in England & Wales'.  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf). Accessed 23 January 2016.

National Union of Students. 2015. 'Lad Culture Audit Report'.  
<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/lad-culture-audit-report>. Accessed January 20 2016.

Paludi, Michelle, A., and DeFour, Darlene C. (1998) 'Sexual Harassment of Students: The Hidden Campus Violence' in Hoffman, Schuh & Fenske [eds] *Violence on Campus: Defining the Problems, Strategies for Action*. Aspen Publishers, inc. pp.187-206

'Race Equality Charter'. 2016. *Equality Challenge Unit*. <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter/>. Accessed January 2016.

Reay, D., G. Crozier, and J. Clayton. 2010. "'Fitting in" or "Standing out": Working class Students in UK Higher Education'. *British Educational Research Journal* 36 (1): 107-24. doi:10.1080/01411920902878925.

Whitley, Leila, and Page, Tiffany. 2015. 'Sexism at the Centre: Locating the Problem of Sexual Harassment'.

*New Formations* 86: 34-53.

World Health Organisation. 2009. *Promoting Gender Equality to Prevent Violence against Women*. [S.I.]:  
World Health Organization (WHO).

## **Appendix one:**

Talks from Sexual Harassment in Higher Education workshop, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015.

1. Tiffany Page
2. Dr Leila Whitley
3. Professor Heidi Mirza
4. Professor Sara Ahmed
5. Dr Alison Phipps

## **Institutional Failings: The management of sexual harassment within higher education**

Tiffany Page

PhD Candidate, Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London

Presented at the *Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Conference*, 2 December 2015, Goldsmiths, University of London

I came to Goldsmiths as a PhD student in 2011 and it feels like this is where this event began, in meeting students in a variety of settings, and in realising the extent to which having to negotiate sexual harassment was the reality for so many, especially at postgraduate levels, which is the context in which I've become most familiar.

Students provide many forms of front line support services within their own departments and wider communities at Goldsmiths and I'm sure this is the case in other institutions. For many of us, we're self-taught and we've had valuable training from feminist academics involved in the Centre for Feminist Research, which has become, as we like to say, a kind of spiritual homeland for feminists within the university. We've become knowledgeable in employment and libel laws, in complaints processes, in writing in ways that document and detail, in exposing ourselves in ways that don't strip us raw but don't shy away from saying what is difficult to express, in seeing others struggling and knowing that at times we ourselves are the best support. As I come close to finishing my PhD, I'm concerned at how this knowledge is not shared in ways that are more permanent, in how there needs to be lasting structures in place that address harassment, that call attention to it, that involve networks that track its movement, for there is movement of harassment from one institution to another.

The labour and emotional energy that goes into addressing issues of sexual harassment needs to be acknowledged, and it often falls to very few, a handful of academic staff, and on the ground through student networks and advocacy. This event marks a space where we want to talk about many of these hidden elements, the unseen labour, the disappearance of harassment, and these are hard conversations to have. They are especially hard with the fear of legal action, and with the need for people to protect themselves. We might be talking in broad brushstrokes, but it is important to be clear, universities have a sexual harassment problem.

Today we want to focus on not only how to respond to sexual harassment and how difficult it can be to make a complaint or to know how to complain, but why and how it happens in institutions, and how it is perpetuated. What are the ways that students' testimonies are marginalized and dismissed? What are the

ways that power operates to mean that certain students will never make a complaint? What are the numbers of students really, actually, that interrupt, leave, fail to complete their studies each year because they have been subjected to sexual harassment by academic staff?

We also want to think about the ways sexual harassment is addressed within policies and procedures, and the ways that white, cis-gendered experiences are often centred and re-centred in discussions of sexual harassment. In drawing upon Heidi Mirza, there is work to be done in how we articulate sexual harassment, both in what it is and what it does, but also in how we do the work to discuss the dynamic differences and tensions in the ways it is experienced. There are differences in how sexual harassment impacts students who are not white or cis-gendered or straight, who are Black, Asian and from other global majority populations, who are trans\* or non-binary and who are queer, who may find it more difficult to be listened to, who do not find the support on campus that they need, and we want the space to talk about this today. These differentiating experiences, that might be compounded by racism or transphobia in both the experience of harassment and after in making a complaint, or in the ways that complaint is managed and responded to, and in its outcomes, need to be addressed by institutions, in the policies and procedures that are developed, and in the specialist services that must be available to support students.

I want to talk briefly about the ways that sexual harassment, as a particular exercise of power connected to both institutions and individuals, has mobility and becomes concealed through its movement. I think that it is critical that our analysis should include focusing on the ways that institutions work, on their failings, on the means in which they protect and conceal, and how problems get passed silently from one organisation to another.

One of the ways that institutions manage sexual harassment is to individualise the problem. A complaint is made about an individual, not a department, and not a culture. When sexual harassment is formally recognised, the institution treats the problem as a problem of an individual aggressor. This is often built into the structure of the complaints process. However, it can be difficult to locate the source of the problem as a single individual. In order for this harassment to circulate and remain in place, any number of other individuals must enable and tolerate it, and therefore be complicit in producing and sustaining an environment that accepts this behaviour. From the stories we have worked with and seen on blogs and websites, other members of that department, and that institution, *know* that sexual harassment is going on. They respond in many ways: by ignoring it, by not taking student complaints or rumours circulating within departments seriously, by distancing themselves from the individual staff member, and by acting as gatekeepers, distancing themselves from students that may be trying to change departments, refusing to help them, not asking questions as to why the student wants to change supervisors, or swap their major.

The refusal of institutional structures to recognise the role that these institutional cultures play in maintaining environments that condone sexual harassment is a means of denying responsibility. This is a method by which responsibility for sexual harassment shifts and the problem of sexual harassment is made to disappear. By treating a reported incident of sexual harassment as a singular, one-off event, by single member of staff, the university can maintain its reputation, and minimize the work involved: it is not the institution that is at fault, is this individual.

The recent case at the University of Colorado Boulder is an example of this. Here, when sexual harassment became known publicly, it was claimed despite the enduring and insidious nature of the harassment occurring within the Philosophy Dept, the presence of the problem was overstated. The university was successfully continuing to deal with cases, “on an individual, case-by-case basis, and normally that’s enough.” There is so much happening in this sentence. This was the institutional language used, even when there were least 15 separate complaints on file, and a significant number of people who had witnessed or

been subjected to harassment and sexualized behaviour. Here it is possible to see how the university as a regulating authority controls the flow of information, determines what abusive behaviour will be tolerated, irrespective of policy, and directs cases of harassment to be treated as an individual irregularity or as a form of pathology. What if after the second case of harassment that an investigation had been launched? What if student enrolment had been suspended while that investigation took place? I want to note at this point that an investigation is always vulnerable to what it sets out to find. When an institution does not want to unearth abusive behaviour, the parameters set, the persons interviewed, the person who conducts the interviewing, the questions asked, and the weight given to student testimony, are all used to conceal and make the harassment disappear. Academic staff are moved sideways, students are not informed of the outcomes, and the institution effectively seals itself closed.

One method of disrupting this model of the “case-by-case” approach, and investigations that start with determined outcomes, is to begin by framing the analysis of sexual harassment with the institution at the centre. As well as holding the individual to account for sexual harassment, the context and conditions in which such practices occur become equally important, and become an essential part of the work in uncovering sexual harassment and addressing it. Change in institutions cannot occur until sexual harassment is no longer understood solely as a discrete, irregular or unusual event that can be controlled by workplace policies. Instead of the problem being associated with an employee, the problem becomes understood as one more centrally located in the organisation itself.

I want to make a final comment about the use of confidentiality by universities who are dealing with sexual harassment cases. While this is supposed to protect students, it also protects the staff member accused of harassment from ever being accountable for their behaviour outside of that singular institution. Confidentiality clauses protect the institution’s reputation and they protect the academic’s reputation. Academics are free to resign during disciplinary proceedings, and free to create the narrative of their choice – “my politics were too radical” is one that you might find used.

One of the reasons why we are holding this conference is because the problem of sexual harassment doesn’t end when the academic is excised; this is not the end to the problem and the end to the work of institutions and senior management teams. When an academic who sexually harasses students resigns or leaves an institution, the problem is *not* solved, it simply is another means in which sexual harassment disappears from view. The person left with the problem is the student. The student is expected to continue with their studies, within the same department and institution where sexual harassment occurred, and seldom with any means of articulating their experience. Meanwhile the academic moves on to a new institution, and students at that university have no knowledge of the abusive behaviour of their new supervisor, their new lecturer.

## **How Sexual Harassment Disappears**

Dr Leila Whitley

Visiting Researcher at the Centre for Feminist Research, Goldsmiths, University of London

I have been thinking about where, if I were to try to give an origin story of this event, I would need to start. To give an account of the inspiration for this day, and of the conditions that made it both possible and necessary, I would have to go back a long way. What I want to start from today is the inauguration of the Centre for Feminist Research and the Feminist Postgraduate Forum at Goldsmiths in 2013. Those of us who came into these two spaces in 2013, the CFR and the FPF, needed them badly. I think the CFR was so important to us because it took what we were experiencing – sexism – and gave it a name. The first conference was even called Sexism: a problem with a name. The FPF and CFR allowed us to have necessary conversations about sexism, and gave us a structure of support as we thought through and confronted the ways that sexism was shaping our experiences of higher education.

One of the first projects that came out of the FPF was the blog Strategic Misogyny. We created the blog as an online forum for fellow students and staff, both at our university and at other universities, to share their stories of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Our idea was to create a site where we could collect these stories in order to expose sexist acts for what they are, and to document the problem of sexual harassment and sexism in higher education. We wanted to show that these experiences constituted harassment, which can sometimes feel hard to do exactly because these kinds of experiences are so common. That sexism and sexual harassment are so common in higher education, and yet rarely is there any sustained objection to these conditions, can make it seem as though the conditions are not objectionable.

We also wanted to show that these acts weren't marginal, or limited to one individual, or one institution. We wanted to document the scale of the problem.

Today's event has a particular focus on the problem of sexual harassment of students by staff. As Anna has already said, this is not something that is spoken of very often. Sexual harassment and sexual violence on campuses in general has become something that we are aware of through the important work of people like Dr. Alison Phipps, who is going to give today's first keynote thought piece.

Sexual harassment of students by staff, however, has not yet become something that we are as aware of.

To think about how this issue is marginalised we might think for example, even, about the organisation of today's event. This event is something that we've been interested in hosting at Goldsmiths for two years or more. Finding institutional support for this event has taken this long. Today is an academic conference in one sense, but in another it's a practical event for the institution, and for institutions more generally, about how to confront and handle sexual harassment on campuses. Included as part of the day, for example, is a training session for the Students Union on how to respond to disclosures of sexual harassment. These types of training are important, and they could (and should) be organised by the university itself or even – because we are talking about how to handle issues involving staff - by the UCU. Instead, today has been organised by students and former students at Goldsmiths, and has largely relied on the voluntary labour of an even larger group of students. I want to be clear about this: it has taken the work of those in a position to be harassed by staff to create the space for a conversation about the problem. Without this voluntary labour, today would not have happened. Sexual harassment of students by staff members would have remained something that is generally not discussed.

One of the things that we have found working with experiences of sexual harassment of students by staff is that it is a problem that is surprisingly – or perhaps unsurprisingly - hard to name. Sexual harassment when

it happens across the teacher/student divide has a way of continually disappearing. Those who write to Strategic Misogyny write of:

soft touches at the waist, comments on clothing, open staring and comments about their bodies.

They write of lecturers speaking too close, of leaning in too far, with boozy breath.

They write of professional opportunities (teaching experience, for example) given out as though they were favours, mixed up with all of the leaning in and touching— perhaps even offered in that boozy breath, while too close.

And they write of being offered tutorials only outside of regular hours, at the pub or at their lecturers home, and of how hard it is to say no to these offers when they feel like the only offer of support.

Why is it so hard to name this sexual harassment as what it is: as sexual harassment? Because that is something else that those who write to Strategic Misogyny describe: the difficulty of naming what is happening to them. They write of how long it went on, of how many times it repeated, before they felt like they could find the name and use the name.

One story describes the way sexual harassment happens in public: while at a departmental event, the lecturer asks the student if she intends to have sex with another of the people in the room. She doesn't respond; she doesn't know how to. Later, she brings it up with friends on the course. She's trying to register what happened to her – to make sense of it, but also to point to it. It is a private conversation following a public act, so that what becomes private is the objection and what remains public is the harassment. The other students laugh. They tell her he's known for that sort of thing. No big deal.

The publicness of the harassment makes it a public matter. But, in the response, the other students treat harassment as something to laugh at, both publicly and privately. When it is brought up as something serious, the fact that it is common becomes a reason that it is not something to object to. And no one other than the student herself does object.

Stories of this sort are common: on another blog project, a woman describes the way that public acts of harassment, along with any attempt to discuss them, are 'laughed off'.

We know that universities are hierarchical spaces. We know that students are dependent on staff in a number of ways. We know, and now I want to speak as someone who has taught both here at Goldsmiths and elsewhere for the past four years, that as academic staff we mark student essays. We make decisions that affect their results and their degrees. We know that we give them advice on how to write, on what to read, and on how they might approach questions – in short, on how to think. Most students I have come across seem to take what I say quite seriously. What I say in a classroom sets the tone. I am often seen as having 'the right answer' - even when I do not, or there is not one. When I have tutorials with students, they do not ask questions if I ask them to meet me in a cafe instead of an office, because no office was available. Because I am positioned as someone who teaches them they trust me, and they also tend to assume that I both know what's best and have their best interests in mind.

What I am pointing to is the power attached to the role of teaching.

The power of being in a teaching role makes it very easy, as we see when sexual harassment occurs, for staff to harass students. There are so many ways that someone who teaches can take advantage of a student.



A common scenario that comes up, and comes up again, is abusing tutorials as a means to gain sexual access to a student. Tutorials that happen outside of office hours; tutorials in pubs and at homes; tutorials as a means to spend time alone with a student who does not want to be alone with a staff member, but who does want support on her essay, her presentation, or in preparation for her exam. In the case of PhD students, we see the close supervisor-supervisee relationship abused as a way to gain intimate access to someone who is in a position to rely on intensive, one to one feedback on work.

These things are hard to name for students exactly because of the power dynamic that allows them to happen in the first place. As we see in the play that Phil Thomas has written, *The Girls Get Younger Every Year*, and that we will read and discuss as our first session today, one of the most insidious ways these things can disappear is through manipulation from the abuser, who may tell a student that he harasses that he understands feminism better than she, and that she is therefore wrong to object – even, that he is a feminist, and therefore his harassment of her cannot be harassment.

There are other, much more blunt ways that abuse can disappear. Exactly because students are dependent on staff, they may fear alienating those who are in a position of power over them. Those who have experienced sexual harassment describe the ways they feared angering those who harassed them, as they saw the meagre access to support offered by these staff members as in fact their *only* access to support. In this way, one of the important ways that sexual harassment fails to appear – fails to take up its name and appear – is through institutional failure to provide safe supporting mechanisms for students, and ensure that academic support can be accessed through other channels when sexual harassment complaints are made.

## **Sexual Harassment: Moving from shame to action or how to make the personal political.**

**Heidi Safia Mirza,**

Professor of Race Faith and Culture, Goldsmiths College, University of London.

(Transcript of talk given at the Sexual Harassment in Higher Education (SHHE) Conference at Goldsmith College, 2 December 2015)

The feminist mantra we love and know so well is the 'personal is political', but how do everyday painful personal experiences of sexual harassment become political? How do our experiences become the 'thing' that moves institutional structures and thinking forward? What must we do to make that happen- to turn our agency into the structure? How do we *really* make the personal political?

Individual experiences of sexual harassment are rarely allowed to do their work except through the courage of the few who stand up and make a difference – those pioneers who sacrifice their careers and reputations and lives challenging the institutional systems. This spring I visited University of California, Berkeley. I was moved to see young women frustrated and let down by their institutions standing up against sexual harassment at a candle light vigil on a dusky evening. Dwarfed by the grand pillared portico of their male hallowed halls of learning, they courageously named the rapists and harassers who they knew and reported, yet no authorities had taken action. I felt so proud of a generation of students who are willing to stake a claim at the table of sexual justice.

### **Making a stand**

There are many historical precedents of women who courageously stand up to sexual harassment. It is a messy, tangled, gendered, classed and raced business. African-American feminists Kimberle Crenshaw (1993) and Patricia Hill Collins (1998) write about the case of Professor Anita Hill, who in 1991 broke the taboo of silence about the sexual harassment in the African-American community by calling out Clarence Thomas, the black Republican Supreme Court judge candidate who openly sexually harassed her and others.

In the horrors and injustices that unfolded in the hearings Anita Hill's 'race' was trumped by her sex. She suffered what Crenshaw calls intersectional disempowerment. She fell between the polarization of black men on one hand and white women on the other, invisible in the separate rhetorical sexual spaces of antiracism and feminism.

There were no narrative tropes, no stories of black women as victim of simultaneous racial and sexual discrimination that enabled her to gain a fair hearing. She was seen as a black middleclass 'lady overachiever', out of place in a world of black 'welfare queens', who was willing to trade her 'honour' for her career. She was also characterised as a 'traitor-to-the race', vilified for using her sexuality to undermine the black community by entrapping a black brother. Thomas conjured up the racist guilt of the white establishment in his defence, provocatively accusing them of a 'high tech lynching'. Constructing himself as the victim of a racist attack, he successfully deflected his actions as a sexual predator.

Anita Hill paid a high price for her courage, which left her the loser in the ultimate game of patriarchal power and male solidarity. Clarence Thomas backed by his white Republican brothers won the case and secured his position. Is what happens to you when you take a stand?

### **A certain private information**

Felly Simmonds (1997) the black British feminist writer tells us that for black women and for women of colour it is impossible to escape the body when living and working inside the 'teaching machine'. Visible

difference written on the body means we are drawn into sharing our own 'very private information' to make a point. Black women can't afford the luxury enjoyed by white male theorists who need not admit their unmarked bodies into theory. They have the privilege to opt for 'silence' about their own private information. Black women, on the other hand, and those who are marked by their disability or sexuality live in and with the body. Those who are trans, intersex, queer, gay and lesbian are also compelled to share a certain degree of private information just so they can be seen and heard and become legitimate. But in so doing the visible become exposed, vulnerable and open to individual scrutiny and judgment. In my 30 years in academia, as a student but also as faculty I have witnessed and been subjected to endemic and sustained sexual harassment in higher education. There's not an institution or time when I have not seen it. It oozes out of every lecture hall, lab, classroom, tutorial, eatery and office. It has different forms in different times, but I think the more times change the more they stay the same.

In the 70s our male lecturers (and they were all male!) had cushions on the floor and would invite you to 'lay lady lay' (a la Bob Dylan) ...with an accompanying spliff and the promises of the benefits being in the in-crowd! As a young woman, the normalcy of your non-personhood meant you were no more than a tasty piece of meat- sampled and discarded.

It was in the 80s that I first noticed casual grooming. Collectivities of men, lecturers, professors even, flocking around the photocopier laughing as they discussed the latest intake of female undergraduates- the next piece of ripe 'juicy ass' and who and how they would seduce them. This was a Lad's game in which young women's bodies were being bought and sold for marks and favours. The sense of male entitlement and objectification of women as 'sport' was complete. I had letters sent to me about squeezing my tits with offers of condoms. I was stalked at conferences, followed home, attacked in cars, locked in rooms, and thrown up against walls in elevators- all for the sake of a disgusting, pathetic grope. If I rejected advances I was told I was nothing, nobody, and would be ousted as the academic fraud I am. I tried to tell, but no one listened.

By the 1990s I came up against more organised grooming. These were men in 'packs' with ring leaders operating in departments with trained 'gofers' who were sent out hunting to bring back female prey, many of whom were SE Asian, mixed race and white working class female students who were seen as particularly sexually available.

In 2000 these packs morphed into more sophisticated 'harems' that complimented the desperate needs of neoliberal performance in higher education. Smart female students or early career researchers were seduced into giving up their intellectual labour in return for 'love', to serve male (and sometimes female) academics in fear of their unproductive failing careers. Louise Morley's (2010) study of gender mainstreaming in universities in Tanzania and Ghana shows how rumours of sexual exchange undermine and denigrate women's achievements. When women gain access to male spaces, the soothing belief among men is, 'of course it is only because of their 'prostitution' that women get in and do well!' In a self-fulfilling prophecy they re-confirm to themselves that women are still not yet ready to occupy an equal place in higher education. When it comes to looking at our patriarchal practices suddenly Africa does not seem that far away!

Now, in 2015 I notice more and more courageous women are fighting back. In the war of post-feminist attrition they are picked off as mentally ill, needy, serial complainers and mischief makers, punished with failed degrees, careers in ruins and palmed off with therapy. The fate of the perpetrators? No more than a slap in the wrist, unpaid leave, early retirement often with a handsome payoff. Burying the human evidence appears to be the HE sectors institutional strategy. The reputational profile or 'honour' of the university is the ultimate currency in market driven higher education. But what a price we pay!

### **Shame and silence**

I like to think of myself as a survivor, but unlike my brave sisters who have outed their perpetrators I find my experiences so painful that they live deep in my soul...in a place of shame. I nearly didn't come to speak today, but Sara (Ahmed) agreed to hold my hand (under the table) and that is what a feminist place of safety is about – a place of growth and nurture and encouragement. So now I can begin to exhale, with you all here, and say that it is by unlocking the door of shame that we can begin to understand the 'affect' or emotions that sustains and feeds gendered sexual harassment. To do this I need to ask difficult questions like, 'how does shame become such a powerful silencer, a compatriot, a 'bedfellow' of institutional acts of gender domination and oppression?' 'Why do we engage in regimes of self-regulation that collaborate with systems of sexual power?'

My research on honour based violence in south Asian communities shows how honour and its mirror image, shame, is fundamental to the survival of oppressive patriarchal regimes (Meetoo and Mirza 2007). We like to think that honour based ideologies belong 'out there' to other cultures: 'hot blooded', vengeful Mediterranean or Latinos, or in these Islamophobic times, 'barbaric' Muslims who must cover or avenge their women's 'honour'. We say, comforting ourselves, 'Surely honour is not part of our western liberal democratic societies where women have freedom, agency and choice?' But sexual harassment and violence cuts across all cultures and predicates itself on the insidious dyad of 'honour and shame'. The shame of being vulnerable, shame of being a victim, of being different, the shame of your sex, the shame of rejection, of not being loved – of not belonging.

Sara Ahmed (2005) explains that the 'bad feelings' shame brings is attributed to oneself rather than the object or other who is the cause of the 'bad feeling'. So when you feel you have failed (to achieve your ideal, where honour elusively resides), you experience shame as hurt and anger which you turn inward to the self. Elspeth Probyn (2010) says shame makes you sick. Writing about shame is painful, it involves exposure of the intimacies of the self in public, it gets into your body, it makes you sick and I have been very sick – please don't let sexual harassment make you sick!

By invoking shame to get to the root of the reproduction of sexual harassment I am not sanctioning or celebrating victimhood, but rather asking us to rethink the power of the self and 'affect' in understanding the emotional cement that keeps the 'Walls' (Ahmed 2012) of everyday gender power relations sedimented and in place.

### **Surviving and moving forward**

I began by asking how we make everyday painful personal experiences of sexual harassment - these incursions into our very being - political and outward looking. How do we make that happen? How do we move monolithic structures and thinking to make a more accepting womanist world – a place we can all be safe, normal, respected and loved for *who we are*?

Sara Ahmed (2012) has invoked her 'slim shady', alter ego, the 'feminist kill-joy', as the one who must remain 'sore' and 'angry' and refuse to be appropriated as the 'happy object' of diversity and equality in our institutions. After 30 years of witnessing entrenched institutionalised sexual harassment, I can say *we collectively* (not individually) must share our shame with our institutions. Shame them just as we are shamed by them. In neoliberal times universities are concerned with their honour, with their reputational gain. But how can they be proud if we are not safe under their keep? Individual shame can become collective acts of anger and outrage if we talk, meet and share our 'sore' and hurt souls to political effect. This is how we make the personal political and move from shame to action! I thank you for asking me to speak and for giving me the opportunity *to make my shame my honour*.

References:

- Ahmed, Sara.(2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. London: Duke University Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle.(1993). 'Whose Story is it anyway? Feminist and antiracist appropriations of Anita Hill', in Morrison, Toni (ed) *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill Clarence Thomas and the Social Construction of Reality*, London: Chatto & Windus
- Hill Collins, Patricia (1998). *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Probyn, Elspeth. (2005). *Blush: Faces of Shame*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Meetoo, Veena, and Mirza, Heidi Safia. (2007) "There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, violence and the limits of multiculturalism *Women's Studies International Forum*. 30, 187–200
- Morley, Louise. (2010) 'Gender mainstreaming: myths and measurement in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 40: 4, 533 — 550  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2010.490377>
- Simmonds, Felly, Nkweto. (1997). 'My body myself: How does a black woman do sociology?' In H. S. Mirza (Ed.), *Black British feminism* (pp. 226-239). London: Routledge.

Sexual Harassment - Professor Sara Ahmed

We need to talk about sexual harassment. **(click)** We need to talk about sexual harassment **here**. And by here I mean here: at Goldsmiths, in universities, in the UK. Not there: over there; but here. Too often: sexual harassment is understood as somebody else's problem. Or if it is recognised as a problem that problem is located in the body of a harasser, a rogue, whose removal is assumed to remove the problem. The problem remains. **(click)** And then those who talk about how the problem *remains* become the problem because they become *reminders* of that problem. To remind is to show how sexual harassment is enabled by an institution. It is to show how sexual harassment is reproduced by an institution. It is to show how sexual harassment becomes a culture; how it works as a network, a web of influences; a set of practices that we are supposed to accept as how things are because that is the way they were.

But if we talk in this way, if we speak of sexual harassment as organisational culture, we threaten the organisation's reputation. Those who are damaged become the ones who cause damage. **(click)** And the institutional response can take the form of: damage limitation. There are so many ways those who speak about harassment, whether their own harassment or the harassment of others, are silenced: you don't even need to sign a confidentiality agreement to be warned of the consequence of your actions. And then, too often, the ones who are harassed end up being removed or removing themselves: if the choices are "get used to it," or "get out of it" some quite understandably "get out of it."

The problem goes on as if it is been deal with, when it hasn't been dealt with. We need to make sense of how a problem is not dealt with by the appearance of being dealt with; and how the struggle to expose sexual harassment often leads us to a *stalling situation*. To make sense of this I want to return to some of the data I collected in a study of diversity and equality in universities that I undertook in the early 2000's, in which I interviewed those appointed by organisation to diversify them, which often meant in practice, those appointed to write the documents and policies that would give expression to an organisation's commitment to equality and diversity. Practitioners become aware of how much commitments are not followed through. One practitioner described her job thus **(click)**: "a banging your head on the brick wall job." **(click)** A job description becomes a wall description. I want to give you one example of an encounter with an institutional wall. I am going to read it out, because you can hear in the story what we are up against **(click)**.

When I was first here there was a policy that you had to have three people on every panel who had been diversity trained. But then there was a decision early on when I was here, that it should be everybody, all panel members, at least internal people. They took that decision at the equality and diversity committee which several members of SMT were present at. But then the director of Human Resources found out about it and decided we didn't have the resources to support it, and it went to council with that taken out and council were told that they were happy to have just three members, only a person on council who was an external member of the diversity committee went ballistic – and I am not kidding went ballistic – and said the minutes didn't reflect what had happened in the meeting because the minutes said the decision was different to what actually happened (and I didn't take the minutes by the way). And so they had to take it through and reverse it. And the Council decision was that all people should be trained. And despite that I have then sat in meetings where they have just continued saying that it has to be just 3 people on the panel. And I said but no Council changed their view and I can give you the minutes and they just look at me as if I am saying something really stupid, this went on for ages, even though the Council minutes definitely said all panel members should be trained. And to be honest sometimes you just give up.

We learn so much from this example. You can change policy without changing practice; changing policy can be a way of not changing practice. We learn too: the director of human resources did not need to take the

decision out of the minutes for that decision not to bring something into effect. I have called this dynamic “non-performativity,” when naming something does not bring something about. **(click)** Taking the decision out of the minutes could have been what stopped something from happening. But because it didn’t stop it, something else did. **(click)** The wall is a finding: *what stops movement moves*.

This example of the diversity policy that does not do anything is a tantalisingly tangible example of what goes on so much and so often. But that it is tangible, that I can share the story with you here today, is a consequence of diversity work and of the labour of a diversity worker, of her blood, sweat and tears. It is a story of how the diversity worker becomes *an institutional killjoy*; we can imagine the eyes rolling when she points out the policy. To be a killjoy one does not have to speak in a certain way; she can be quite reasonable, she might even have backing. They hear you as killjoy because they do not want to hear what you have to say. **(click)** No wonder this story is a story of her exhaustion, of being worn down by coming up against the same thing; the story of how she gives up is a story of how the wall keeps standing. **(click)** But to those who do not come up against it, the wall does not appear: the institution might seem as happy as its mission statement, as willing as its equality statement.

This example has stayed with me as I have been involved in an effort to challenge the problem of sexual harassment in universities. That has been an experience of coming up against wall after wall. A wall can come up to prevent students from making complaints in the first place. Students are actively discouraged from making complaints: if you complain you will damage your career (this can work as threat, you *will* lose the very connections that enable you to progress); or if you complain you will damage the professor; or if you complain you will ruin a centre or collective (often aligned with something critical and progressive). Another wall comes up once complaints have been made. Complaints are heard as an injury to the professor’s reputation as what stops him from receiving the benefits to which he is assumed to be entitled. Complaints about sexual harassment are not made public as a way of protecting the organisation from damage. We are back to this: damage limitation.

Notice here: so many complex things are going on at the same time, which combine to stop sexual harassment from, as it were, coming out. It is not that this activity is coordinated by one person or even necessarily a group of people who are meeting in secret, although secret meetings probably do happen. All of these activities, however complex, sustain a direction; they have a point. A direction does not require something to originate from a single point: in fact a direction is achieved through the alignment between points that do not have to meet. Different elements combine to achieve something that is solid and tangible. If one element does not hold, or become binding, another element holds or binds. The process is rather like the cement used to make walls: something is set before it hardens. Perhaps when people notice the complexity, the movement, the inefficiency, the disorganisation, they do not notice the cement; how things hold together; that things hold together. Then when you say there is a pattern you are heard as paranoid as if you are imagining that all this complexity derives from a singular point.

**(click)** To try and bring someone to account is to come up against not just an individual but histories, histories that have hardened, that stop those who are trying to stop what is happening from happening. The weight of that history can be thrown at you; you can be hit by it. The word harass remember derives from the French *harasser* "tire out, vex". When you speak of harassment you can end up being harassed all over again. Harassment is a network that stops information from getting out by making it harder to get through. It is how someone is stopped by being worn down. **(click)** A policy disappears despite there being a paper trail, despite the evidence, or perhaps even because of the evidence. A complaint disappears because it is evidence. People disappear too, because of what they make evident, of what they try to bring into view. When we talk about sexual harassment we are talking about missing women. And missing critiques, missing conversations; you are not even allowed to talk about it. We are having a conversation now about what and who is missing.

Of course when we talk about sexual harassment as a wall it is assumed as a problem of perception: you were willing, he didn't anything by it, don't be so upright, we're all adults here. A wall comes up in this reframing of walls as immaterial, as if there is nothing, getting in your way, as if it is just you, getting in the way of your own progression. Sexual harassment works – as does bullying more generally – by increasing the costs of fighting against something, making it easier to accept something than to struggle against something, even if that acceptance is itself the site of your own diminishment; how you end up taking up less and less space. It is because we perceive this wall that we end up having to modify our perception (this is what it means to get “used to it”). You might feel you cannot afford to become alienated from those around you; you might lose access not only to material resources (references, scholarships, courses to teach), but you might lose friends; connections that matter. Maybe you begin to feel that the wall is inside your own head. It is happening all around you; and yet people seem to getting on with it, you can end up doubting yourself, estranged from yourself. Maybe then you try not to have a problem. But you are left with a sickening feeling.

Because all around you there is a partial sighting of walls, a partial sighting that is at once a justification; oh he's a bit of a womanizer, oh yeh I was warned about him; oh yeh that was the booze talking; there might even be a smiling, a joking, there might even be a certain kind of affection. This affection is structured as an appeal to students whose concern is bordering on disclosure: let it go; let him off. A culture is built around this affection which is to say: harassers are enabled by being forgiven, as if their vice is our virtue. And those who know it is wrong even when they try to persuade themselves otherwise, even when they try to minimize a mountain of abuse, can feel all the more wrong, can feel the full force of it, when the wall finally does come into view: she is not ok, I am not ok, this is not ok: “how could I let this happen?” Guilt; shame; they can leak out, getting everywhere. We have to go through these difficult painful feelings Heidi described so well. Perhaps sometimes we just can't do this; it means being prepared to be undone, and we just don't know if we are ready to put ourselves back together again.

Or sometimes we don't confront sexual harassment because of our interests. Maybe someone else is being harassed; and you can see it, you might turn away; look away, because you are benefiting from an alliance with someone; you want to keep that alliance. You might then be angry with those who are harassed because they threaten your alliances by revealing the harassment. You cannot be angry with the harasser because he is who you wish to be in alliance with. Alliances are crucial to the mechanics of sexual harassment; sexual harassment is an alliance. In addition the organization too might try not to see things; maybe they think we have to retain him because of his reputation; maybe we need him for the REF. There is a collective or institutional will not to notice what is assumed to get in the way of our interests. Alliances enable the pursuit of interests.

I need to say a little more. I began by saying that we need to talk about sexual harassment here and that by here I meant at educational institutions especially those that identify as progressive and critical. **(click)** I have used the terms “critical sexism” and “critical racism” to describe this: the sexism and racism reproduced by those who think of themselves as too critical to be sexist or racist. There is more to it. Many academics who identify as progressive or radicals, position themselves as working against the institution, against the requirements, say, of audit culture, and managerialism. **(click)** Then how quickly: equality as such becomes identified as the requirements of a managerial system, that is, as a way of managing unruly bodies and desires. Noncompliance with equality even becomes articulated as political rebellion. **(click)** For example one academic based here describes the “strictures on sexual harassment” as an “old Victorian moral panic.” Feminism becomes translated as moralism; those who challenge sexual harassment are understood as imposing moral norms on otherwise “free radicals.” So



much harassment is reproduced by the framing of the language of harassment as what is imposed on a situation (as if to use this word is to be mean, to deprive a body of its pleasures).

I think moralism is useful as a charge because it carries another implication: that feminism masks its own will to power. Whenever we challenge what is being assembled, who is being assembled, we are assumed as wanting power: as wanting their courses, their centres; even their students, for ourselves. This can circulate as rumour and innuendo, implying that the feminists only object because they want what they object to. Sexual harassment is fundamentally dependent on anti-feminism especially when sexual harassment begins to be challenged, when a “no,” is repeated, when a “no” acquires more force.

There is more to say here. Think of all those rules, those procedures we have for safeguarding the interests of parties including students, a population that is precarious by virtue of its position (dependent on passing through the gates of academy; you have to pass examinations to pass through). I am referring of course to record keeping: record keeping can be suspended by being identified as yet more bureaucracy: as if to say, “fuck you.” (**click**) The suspension of regulations: methods for ensuring there is no record, no public memory, ways of stopping us from knowing what is going on; how things keep going on.

We are up against history; walls. This tendency to suspend the regulations actually informs so much academic culture. It is business as usual. (**click**) I would say that in describing how sexual harassment becomes part of a culture we are remarkably close to describing academic culture. So we might have advertised the job but we know who are going to employ, his mate, his friend, his contacts. Academic networks, boy’s clubs; men’s rooms: they exist at this moment of suspension, those informalities that allow the same bodies to keep getting through. Equal opportunities becomes a loop, a hoop, something you almost do, or you appear to do; but really when you hire someone you are looking for “kind of person you can take to the pub,” to quote from someone on an interview panel, someone who is relatable, *like me*, who can participate in this, *with me*. Sexual harassment as a system cannot be separated from the ongoing problem of how a privileged few reproduce a world around their bodies. The sexism in academic citation – the removal of any texts or traces of female authors from books, from courses - is part of the same system. I still remember a white male professor give a lecture on power, something a lot of feminists have written about, when the only time he referred to any women was when he mentioned fancying Kate Winslet. Sexism in citation and sexual harassment – how women are made objects not subjects– is part of the same system. The trouble with this system: it works.

We need to recognise sexual harassment as an institutional problem as well as a means through which the academy itself becomes available only to some. Sexual harassment is an access issue; it is a social justice issue. We also need to survive this system because of how it is working. (**click**) Testifying to a traumatic experience is a traumatic experience. Sexual harassment is traumatic, for those who are on the receiving end, for those who testify, for those who listen; who bear witness. We need to give the pain somewhere to go. (**click**) Which means: we need to create support systems so that we can share the costs of bringing the problem to attention. Feminism is itself such a support system, and I would include here feminist knowledge, coming to an understanding of how a system works is one way we survive that system. And: we need to share accounts of what we come up against so we don’t feel like we are doing this work on our own. Which means: we need to create shelters, refuges, pockets in institutions in which we can breathe. (**click**) My comments today are dedicated to all the students who, at considerable risk, have testified to sexual harassment **here**. You have helped to create these pockets. Our task is now to expand them. Thank you.

## Sexism and violence in the neoliberal university

*Dr. Alison Phipps, Sussex Centre for Gender Studies*

I want to talk about markets. Education markets, institutional markets, sexual markets: brought together by similar modes of assessment and audit. University league tables; module evaluation forms; 'sex charts' in student residences. Hierarchies of performance (which are often hierarchies of masculinity) at national, institutional and individual levels.

Rate your university. Rate your lecturer. Rate Your Shag.

2013 saw the emergence of a number of Facebook pages under the latter slogan, linked to universities across the country. They offered a space for students to give sexual liaisons marks out of ten based on any criteria, and were ['liked' by about 20,000 users](#) of the social network in the first 72 hours. The activity was supposed to be anonymous, but privacy quickly evaporated under the instruction to 'name them, shame them and if you must, praise them.'

Name them and shame them. All the pages were rapidly deleted by Facebook, deemed to contravene its policies on bullying and harassment. Unsolicited evaluation *is* bullying and harassment. Unsolicited evaluation is also very often gendered – women are appraised, men do the appraising. Although students of all genders had been encouraged to post, much of the Rate Your Shag content consisted of men rating women on criteria drawn from heteronormative and objectified constructions of femininity.

*'Was like shagging her mouth, best blowjob in [the city]. Eight out of ten.'*  
*'Nought out of ten. Shit body and one heavy dose of Chlamydia. Get checked love.'*

Rate Your Shag forms part of a whole lexicon of activities which in the past few years have been grouped under the banner of 'lad culture'. Sports initiations, 'pimps and hos' parties, the 'fuck a fresher' frenzy, for example. Such pursuits express traditional forms of sexism and male entitlement, but they are also inflected with something else. ['Sex charts'](#) are appearing in student residences, to quantify and assess conquests. Women are being given grades and ratings for their physical appeal. Men are scoring ['points' for sexual 'achievements'](#) - such as 'slipping a finger in on the dance floor', and 'bedding a virgin – with blood to prove it.' These [forms of sexual audit](#) evoke our contemporary marketised environment. 'Lad culture' and neoliberal culture are natural bedfellows.

Unsolicited evaluation is bullying and harassment. Constant evaluation is bullying and harassment. Contemporary 'lad culture' was defined by [one of my research participants](#) as a 'hostile environment where everyone is judging everyone else.' This also describes cultures amongst higher education staff, alienated by institutional and sectoral frameworks that constantly measure them against each other and against the curve. This evaluation is gendered: men continue to hold most of the positions of power in the sector, definitions of 'success' prioritise research (coded as masculine) over teaching and admin (coded as feminine), and criteria for assessment exercises such as the REF favour modes of [scholarship and impact](#) which reward the confidence, time and freedom to take risks and consistently self-promote.

A [UCU survey](#) in 2012 found that bullying and harassment between staff in universities was rife. This reflects both traditional hierarchies and abuses of power, and newer forms of competitive individualism which lack empathy and ethics. The university has become a dog-eat-dog environment; this is reflected in both staff and student communities. We know less about the prevalence of staff-on-student harassment, due to the [institutionalised power relations](#) which work against it even being named. However, [we know it exists](#): and high profile examples, mostly from the US, give a sense of how these modes of violence work.

Consider the case of [famous Berkeley astronomer Geoff Marcy](#), a potential Nobel laureate who persistently violated the institution's sexual harassment policies between 2001 and 2010. According to one student's account, she was at a department dinner when Marcy slid his hand up her thigh and grabbed her crotch.

For many women, this entitlement to touch is familiar. Such 'everyday' boundary-crossings are also central to 'lad culture', although more often performed in public as part of group one-upmanship. Many of my research participants described such 'casual groping' as part and parcel of a normal night out. Indeed, such behaviours have become so commonplace that they are often invisible: instead, the aspect of 'lad culture' which has captured the media and public consciousness is its cruel and shocking 'banter'. This laddish language taps both the violence of hypermasculinity and the callousness of the neoliberal climate.

'Uni Lad does not condone rape without saying 'surprise.'"

Non-consensual sex is 'fun for one.'

I'm going out to 'get some gash.'

The marketised university is a culture based on 'having' or 'getting' (grades and/or jobs), in which education has become a transactional exchange. This is reflected in the rather estranged 'lad cultures' I have studied, with older ideas about 'having' women augmented by newer notions of accumulating sexual capital. The principle of maximum outcomes for minimal effort which now underpins educational consumption also animates the quest for an 'easy lay'.

I'm going out to 'get some gash'.

In laddish 'banter', ancient expressions of woman-hating co-exist with more modern sexualised consumerism, packaged up in postmodern claims to irony. Such 'banter' has also been observed amongst some faculty cultures – for instance, the Being a Woman in Philosophy blog, a repository for stories of sexism in the discipline, recounts a [comic containing a rape joke](#) being sent to a junior faculty member by a philosopher at another institution, copied to all the other members of her department. In [another entry](#), a recent philosophy graduate recalls a conversation about a job application essay with her previous head of department, in which chose to illustrate a point about how two people's wills could conflict with the example of him raping her. Finally, in a post entitled '[a sampling of minor incidents](#)', another student describes a faculty member stopping his lecture to ask her, 'did you just flash me?' because she adjusted her cardigan, and a famous professor discussing with male students which female students were 'hot' and which were 'dogs'.

In this context, it's perhaps unsurprising that University of Miami philosophy professor Colin McGinn, said to have subjected a female doctoral student to months of unwanted innuendo and propositions, [defined the relationship](#) as 'warm, consensual' and 'full of banter'.

Don't worry – it's just banter.

What is the line between 'banter' and sexual harassment? In my research on 'lad cultures' amongst students, and also in media debates, the second has often been reduced to the first. There has also been a refusal to engage with how speech itself can be harmful, and how the realm of the symbolic can frame structural and embodied violence – instead, we often find ourselves on the back foot in debates about men's rights to 'cause offence'. Women are always getting offended by something or other.

In 2012, the Imperial College newspaper Felix published a 'joke' article providing male students with a recipe for the date rape drug rohypnol, as a 'foolproof way' to have sex on Valentine's Day. The previous

year an Exeter University society printed a 'shag mag' including an article speculating about how many calories a man could burn by stripping a woman naked without her consent.

When the Facebook page 'Holyland Lad Stories' (currently 'liked' by almost 30,000 users) was criticised on Twitter, its curators responded 'get a fucking grip – we're having a bit of harmless banter.' Amongst the content highlighted as problematic was a post describing an incident in which a man had knocked a woman 'clean out with one smack' and left her for dead on the side of the road.

Get a fucking grip – [it's just banter](#).

To 'offend' with impunity is a function and exercise of privilege. This applies to the invisibilising and excusing of sexual violence perpetrated by middle class white men, and the insistence of all privileged groups that their ignorant, hurtful and harmful comments about marginalised people are 'just my opinion' or 'just a joke.' It is a cruel irony that only those with the social, cultural and political power to hurt other groups get to evade responsibility for it. This irony was recently painfully apparent when Goldsmith's Welfare and Diversity Officer Bahar Mustafa was [arrested and charged](#) for allegedly tweeting on the #killallwhitemen hashtag. The discrepancy between the punitive treatment of Bahar and the amused indulgence of laddish 'banter' is a stark reminder of the ways in which 'free speech' is the property of some and not others.

Kill all white men.

It's not rape if you shout 'surprise'.

Structural relations of gender and race inequality render one of these a much more credible threat than the other. Indeed, they make the first statement an understandable expression of frustration about a racist and misogynist society, while the second is evidence of it. Nevertheless, the political hyperbole of 'killallwhitemen' became a crime, while laddish banter is [defended as an exercise of freedom](#).

Oh, get a fucking grip – it's just banter.

The privilege to offend is often wielded in response to privilege being threatened: in this, contemporary 'laddish' masculinities are marked out from working class laddism, which has been seen as more to do with alienation. The main players in the recent theatre of student laddism in the UK are middle class and white, progeny of the 1990s 'new lad' and the Bullingdon Club toffs. These rugby players, drinking and debating society 'bros' are also siblings of the frat boys in the US who are central to debates there about campus violence.

The aggressive sexism these privileged men perpetrate in student social spaces can be defined as a 'strategic misogyny'. Sexual harassment very often functions to preserve [masculine power and space](#). Our 'uni lads' enact the backlash against feminism, embodying populist and policy concerns about the 'crisis of masculinity' and the 'feminisation' of HE. Feminism has gone too far.

Contemporary laddism is a defensive strategy by those accustomed to topping the ranks, threatened by both the reality and the hyperbole of women's achievement, the idea and practice of 'widening participation' and the increasingly blurred lines (no pun intended) of gender and sexuality amongst student and youth cultures. Laddism is an equal-opportunity offender, rooted in sexism but often incorporating [racism, classism, transphobia and homophobia](#) as well.

Feminism has gone too far.

Boys need to be protected.

There is evidence that in reaction to these ideas (and also in fear of their 'disruptive' working class and black contemporaries), white middle class boys are being [hothoused by parents](#) who see them as frail and imperilled. Boys need to be protected.

This propensity to feel threatened is palpable in both 'lad culture's unmistakable 'woman rage' and the way critics of laddish behaviours have been vilified as [ensorious, creepy](#) and a [menace to freedom](#). We must catch the grain of truth here - feminist initiatives, especially in the area of anti-violence, have sometimes been co-opted by prevailing [moral panics and carceral projects](#). However, first and foremost laddish defensiveness is part of the anti-feminist backlash, and a dialectic between student communities perceived as excessively 'politically correct' because of their advocacy for the marginalised, and the privileged who experience this liberatory politics as oppression. *They* are not to be evaluated.

They just can't say *anything* any more.  
Oh, get a fucking grip – it's just banter.

A similar reformulation of critique and resistance as oppression has been identified by Sara Ahmed in the way that some male academics have responded to equality initiatives in higher education. Anti-discrimination, sexual harassment and other diversity policies can be resisted alongside more problematic new managerialist reforms which threaten scholarly autonomy. Elite male professors become the victims within narratives of restricted freedom and nostalgia for a '[simpler time](#)' when their rights to do as they wished [were not curtailed](#). Feminism has gone too far. Political correctness is out of control.

As [Ahmed argues](#), these critiques often settle on 'complaining' students who are seen as entitled and demanding, even in their appeals for equality. This location of neoliberalism in the consumerist student serves to hide the fact that, as [Whitley and Page contend](#), academics also benefit from new bureaucratic regimes which cement their [power over students](#) and make it difficult for students to speak out.

The costs of speaking out are illustrated in a heartbreaking [post by a PhD student](#) on the Being a Woman in Philosophy blog:

*I just want to caution those of you out there who are thinking about coming forward to report sexual predators. Expect your department to turn on you; expect your department to retaliate against you. Expect to be bad mouthed at every PhD program to which you apply. Expect to lose your committee. Expect to lose your letter writers. Expect your department to withdraw all support from you. Expect to become persona non grata. Expect to be de facto barred from all opportunities in your department. Expect to be gas-lighted. Expect people to be thrilled to watch your fall from grace. And, then, when you succeed, against all odds, and despite the prodigious efforts of your department to the contrary, through sheer force of will and talent, expect your department to exploit your success at every opportunity. Expect to watch as your success is used to further the career of the predator. Expect them to ignore your pleas to stop. Expect this.*

In an article about being sexually harassed by her PhD supervisor, [Susan Gardner writes](#) that once she changed supervisors she was disappointed to find that her new one was not keen to support her or even discuss what she had been through, ostensibly for fear that it might impact on her ability to get tenure. In this country, similar structures of probation and performance management can make colleagues reluctant to step out of line. Furthermore, the developing '[pressure-cooker culture](#)' for senior colleagues and fears about casualisation for junior ones have created an individualism which may mean that academics turn a blind eye to difficult issues while trying to keep our jobs (at best) and advance our careers (at worst).

I began my research and activism on sexual violence against students around ten years ago, and was

immediately struck by how difficult it was to get colleagues (of any gender) to show interest in, let alone take action on, issues which did not directly affect them. I have vivid memories of giving a talk to a meeting of mostly senior women, in which the customary noises of outrage failed to materialise as action. In contrast, shortly afterwards I was inundated with input and offers of help as I drafted a consultation document around maternity leave and the REF.

I am not taking the moral high ground or pointing the finger; there are plenty of issues I have overlooked. Individuals are not to blame for this, especially not women and academics from other marginalised groups for whom university life is still a struggle. The constant evaluation of the neoliberal regime makes it difficult for us to look up from our desks, let alone take on the institution in what is usually a losing battle. Constant evaluation creates silence.

Higher education markets, epitomised by league tables, ensure that bullying, harassment and violence are minimised and rendered invisible. They become a PR issue, hushed up for the sake of recruitment and reputation. In a context of widespread denial, nobody wants to risk their campus being defined as 'unsafe'. In the US, despite a [legislative framework](#) mandating the publication of campus crime statistics which is more than 20 years old, institutions [continue to be criticised](#) for covering these up, or encouraging students to drop complaints, in order to preserve their market position.

The result of this is what Ahmed has pointed out: bringing a problem to institutional attention frequently means [becoming the problem](#). This operates at multiple levels, from departmental micro-politics to the rather grandiose idea of 'bringing the university into disrepute.' Feminist killjoys and whinging women are bringing the university into disrepute - as if the prevalence of violence in the higher education sector has not brought us all into disrepute already.

We are all in disrepute already!

Amidst this denial and silencing, it is not surprising that only 4 per cent of women students experiencing serious sexual assault [report to their institutions](#). Whitley and Page add that the stress and opacity of complaints processes is also a deterrent to reporting, and the demands of student support systems can make it difficult for victims not to just drop out.

Furthermore, trends towards the [outsourcing of essential services](#) such as campus security and [student support](#) threaten student safety and the quality of pastoral care. Commercial service providers tend to offer one-size-fits-all solutions, set within cost-cutting business models. This is a particularly bleak picture in relation to [student counselling](#), already outsourced in Northern Ireland, where burned out practitioners on depressed wages are offering a reduced range of services in a context of growing psychological demand.

In the neoliberal university though, it's all about the bottom line. Supporting students costs money. Complaining students cost reputation (and threaten income streams). There is a cost/benefit equation here.

But whose cost counts?

Sexual harassment and violence in higher education are situated within cost/benefit frameworks which prioritise the welfare of the institution. Incidents must be hushed up lest they jeopardise our recruitment. Incidents must be hushed up lest they damage our reputation. 'A Star Philosopher Falls' was the way Colin McGinn, who resigned after allegations of ongoing sexual harassment, was described.

Allegations of sexual harassment and violence pose a cost to the institution. But who pays the price?

Victims and survivors do: most of them women. This price is high. It could be the loss of departmental support for research, the breakdown of a supervisory team, or the inability to go on to campus for fear of running into the perpetrator. Often, the [price is so high](#) that it is less costly to leave. There is a term for this - institutional betrayal – and it has been shown to hugely exacerbate trauma. That’s the bottom line - we are betraying our students.

In an [article in Time Magazine](#), Emma Sulcowicz, the Columbia University student who carried her mattress around campus for 8 months to protest against the handling of her rape complaint, described her experience as follows:

*Every day, I am afraid to leave my room. Even seeing people who look remotely like my rapist scares me. Last semester I was working in the dark room in the photography department. Though my rapist wasn't in my class, he asked permission from his teacher to come and work in the dark room during my class time. I started crying and hyperventilating. As long as he's on campus with me, he can continue to harass me.*

We are betraying these students.

Institutional betrayal does not just refer to responses to sexual assault, but the fact that universities actively create conditions which are conducive to it. This can be [experienced as a betrayal](#) more acute than the lack of institutional response. As Sulcowicz said of Columbia: ‘they’re more concerned about their public image than keeping people safe.’

We are definitely betraying these students.

We are also shirking our legal responsibilities – according to the [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#), the Public Sector Equality Duty and Human Rights Act both mandate universities to deal with gender-based and sexual violence.

How do we move forward? The student movement in this country is consistently showing us the way – under the leadership of and inspired by the [NUS Women’s Campaign](#), we now have consent education initiatives, bystander intervention training, awareness-raising projects, ‘zero tolerance’ pledges, and an effort to develop better policies and procedures. However, most of this activity is student-run: many institutions have yet to take any action at all.

In September this year, the Business Secretary asked Universities UK to [convene a task force](#) to tackle ‘lad culture’ and violence against women on university campuses. This task force has been tasked with developing a code of practice for institutions to support cultural change.

Support cultural change. This is a big idea. We need to think big on this.

Sexual harassment and violence in the higher education sector is primarily about gender. We need to think big about gender, confronting misogyny and male entitlement in our university communities, and connecting them with gendered norms and inequalities in society at large. We need to think big about how gender intersects with other power structures and oppressions: the racism, classism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia of ‘lad culture’ are evidence of this. Thinking big about gender also requires us to acknowledge that although women are very often its victims, sexual and gender-based violence affects students of all genders. There is [evidence from the US suggesting](#) that transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming and gender questioning students who do not identify as women may face high levels of risk: this is a gender issue.

We also need to engage with neoliberalism, as it shapes the higher education sector in general and institutions in particular. Sexual harassment and violence in higher education is situated within the culture of constant evaluation. Gender relations are practised via the marketised and managerialist structures of the university, which aggravate inter-group resentments, exacerbate the abuse of hierarchies, and intensify the silencing of victims.

We cannot tackle sexism and violence in the higher education sector properly without looking honestly at neoliberal values and how these shape dysfunctional and harmful communities. Constant evaluation facilitates bullying and harassment. Constant evaluation *is* bullying and harassment.

Finally, we need to be aware of the risk that anti-violence initiatives will be caught up in, and depoliticised by, that culture of monitoring and evaluation. Let's set a target. Let's tick that box. Let's run a workshop and put it in the Annual Report. We need to resist the temptation to get our house in order, to **perform** what should shake the institution to its core. Although effective advocacy often involves compromise, women have been put in enough compromising positions already. It will take more than this.

Let's not just get our house in order. Let's tear the whole damn building down. Who's with me?



## **Appendix two: Comparison of University Conflict of Interest Policies (as of December 2014)**

Online research tracking the use of the following sentence in Conflict of Interest Policies at various UK universities:

**“The College does not wish to prevent, or even necessarily be aware of, liaisons between staff and students and it relies upon the integrity of both parties to ensure that abuses of power do not occur.”**

[Goldsmiths College Policy on Conflicts of Interest (including those arising from personal relationships)]

<<http://www.gold.ac.uk/governance/policies/conflicts/>>

This sentence (along with many other sentences in Goldsmith’s Conflicts of Interest Policy) features in the policies of several other Universities, although its use differs depending on where in the policy it is placed, and what caveats are included with it.

### **1.) 2008 Times Higher Education article - *Conduct codes discourage any staff-student sex***

<<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/conduct-codes-discourage-any-staff-student-sex/404710.article>>

Article about the University of Warwick reviewing its policy on staff-student relationships in 2008 after it emerged that a mature student had an abortion and a mental breakdown following a relationship with a 57-year-old professor. This article covers various approaches by other universities including Cambridge, King’s College London and the University of St Andrews, all of which take a stronger stance in their policies. Ends with this sentence: "In contrast, City University London's code says it 'does not wish to ... necessarily be aware of liaisons between staff and students, and it relies upon the integrity of both to ensure that abuses of power do not occur.'

### **2.) Institutions that currently include this sentence, in full or in part, somewhere in their Conflict of Interest Policies:**

University of Manchester’s Consensual Relationships Policy 2009

<<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=2752>>

University of Plymouth Consensual Relationships Code 2010

<[https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2552/consensual\\_relationships\\_code\\_v1.1\\_july\\_2010.doc](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2552/consensual_relationships_code_v1.1_july_2010.doc)>

Lady Margaret Hall College (Oxford) Code of Conduct on Professional Relationships

<<http://www.lmh.ox.ac.uk/getdoc/18692730-9423-406e-8527-37ec057da40c/Professional-relationships.aspx>>

Wadham College (Oxford) 2014 Conflicts of Interest Policy

<[http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/docs/ConflictsofInterestP\\_1408533392.pdf](http://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/docs/ConflictsofInterestP_1408533392.pdf)>

### 3.) A different way in which part of this sentence is used

In the policy of Lady Margaret Hall College (Oxford) a part of the sentence is used, but is preceded by this statement:

“The College values good professional relationships between staff and students. these relationships are heavily reliant upon mutual trust and confidence, and can be jeopardised when a member of staff enters into a romantic/sexual liaison with a student. At the extreme, these liaisons can jeopardise professional relationships and can be an abuse of power. Problems can also occur when a consensual relationship later becomes non-consensual or a case of harassment.

Such relationships between tutors or College lecturers and their current tutees, whether students at LMH or another college, and advisers and their current advisees, **are not permitted** because of the clear conflict with professional responsibilities. **They will therefore be treated as disciplinary offences.** In all other cases *the College relies upon the integrity of both parties to ensure that abuses of power do not occur.*”

[Lady Margaret Hall College (Oxford) Code of Conduct on Professional Relationships. (My italics and bold).]

<<http://www.lmh.ox.ac.uk/getdoc/18692730-9423-406e-8527-37ec057da40c/Professional-relationships.aspx>>

The result is a much clearer stance on the unacceptability of sexual/romantic relationships between staff and students in cases where there is a tutor–tutee or an advisor-advisee relationship.

### 4.) Examples of different and clearer, stronger stances being adopted in Conflicts of Interest Policies at UK Universities

#### Warwick University

“5.4 In order to maintain a professional relationship with students based on trust, confidence and equal treatment, staff are strongly advised not to enter into an intimate relationship with a student for whom they have a professional responsibility. Such relationships can lead to a lack of confidence in the integrity of due process and perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.

5.5 The University recognises, however, that such relationships may exist, either when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrolls. Where a member of staff involved in such a relationship would ordinarily have a professional relationship with a student, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his or her Head of Department (or nominated representative) or the Director of Human Resources, in order that alternative arrangements can be made. Such steps should include the prohibition of the member of staff from accessing a student’s records on SITS or other local student records system; from accessing the student’s assessment record on EMU or other local mark entry system and/or ensuring that the Head of Department is able to audit any such entries made. This is to protect both the staff member and student from accusations of unfair and preferential treatment.”

[Warwick University – Personal Conflicts of Interest Policy 2009 (my italics and bold)]  
<[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/insite/atoz/p/personal\\_conflicts\\_of\\_interest\\_policy.doc](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/insite/atoz/p/personal_conflicts_of_interest_policy.doc)>

### King's College London

“Romantic or sexual relationships that occur in the student-teacher context or in the context of employment, supervision or evaluation present special problems. The difference in power and the respect and trust that are often present between a teacher and student, supervisor and subordinate, or senior and junior colleague in the same department or unit makes these relationships especially vulnerable to exploitation. They also generate real or perceived inequalities, not only involving the persons concerned, but also affecting other members of the department, whether students or staff. ...

2) Graduate students are vulnerable too, not least because they are at a point in their academic careers when the good opinion of their supervisors and teachers may be vital.

a. relationships between academic members of teaching staff and graduate students are very strongly discouraged, especially between a supervisor and a graduate supervisee.

b. If such a relationship occurs between a member of staff and a graduate student a senior member of staff should be informed as soon as possible.

c. The member of staff should withdraw from supervising the student, and from writing letters of recommendation for them.

d. Where possible, the Head of Department should be notified.

e. As much as possible, the Department encourages a practice of full disclosure in the case of such relationships' continuance: this avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest, as well as embarrassment for others.”

[Kings College London policy on staff-student relationships]

<<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/philosophy/study/handbook/resources-links/Staffstudent-relationships-finalmarch13.pdf>>

### 5.) Further reading: ‘Sexual Exploitation in Higher Education – A Very Private Affair’

The pdf of this book is available from The Clinic for Boundaries Studies here:

<<http://www.professionalboundaries.org.uk/resources/>>

It is based on research conducted in the UK in the nineties.

**6.) Concluding remark** – after looking at various University policies, and in light of the recent complaints and investigations at Goldsmiths, I would personally recommend that Goldsmiths adopts a policy similar to the one used by King's College London, available here:

<<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/philosophy/study/handbook/resources-links/Staffstudent-relationships-finalmarch13.pdf>>

