SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE IVORY TOWER

by

Cathy L. Carpenter

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia

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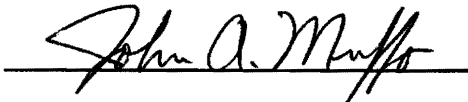fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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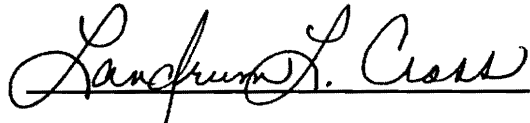College Student Personnel Services

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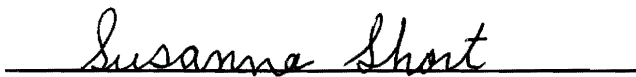
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(ABSTRACT)

This exploratory study was conducted to examine the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment on the college campus of Virginia Tech. The purpose was to identify the frequency of occurrence, the type of incidents, the seriousness of the harassment, and the awareness level of students concerning sexual harassment issues. To gain insight into sexual harassment, forty-seven college women from women's organizations were interviewed in five focus groups and asked about sexual harassment issues at Virginia Tech. Literature was used to develop the questions. The data were analyzed using categories formed based on students' responses to interview questions.

Findings from this study revealed the presence of sexual harassment on the campus of Virginia Tech, though most of the students had not directly experienced it. Of those with direct experience, the incidents closely paralleled reports in the literature. Though apparently not a wide-spread phenomena on the Virginia Tech campus, students expressed a need for more information, more access to resources for help, and greater campus awareness.

These findings may have utility for campus administrators who design information services and institutional response mechanisms to help students cope with this problem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon
(Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold,
Ormerod, & Weitzman, 1988). It is not a new problem
(Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Until the past few years, sexual
harassment was ignored or downplayed. Sexual harassment has
been neglected on college campuses partially because of
vague explanations that make it difficult to label (Ender,
1992). Sexual harassment is one of the least recognized
forms of abuse on the college campus (Paludi & Barickman,
1991). It is an abuse that often forces the student to
forego "work, research, educational comfort, or even a
career" (Paludi & Barickman, 1991, p.4). Women change their
career goals, majors, and classes as a result of the
harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Sexual harassment is
an important barrier to women's career development
(Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Other consequences of sexual
harassment include damage to the physical well-being,
emotional health, depression, insomnia, headaches,
helplessness, and decreased motivation (Whitmore, 1983).

A campus environment that fosters sexual harassment

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interferes with the learning process and career development
of its victims (Paludi & Barickman, 1991). It is a major
educational equity issue (Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986).
Teachers are in a position of authority where they evaluate
a student's performance. If a teacher initiates a sexual
demand, the student does not know what the reaction would be
if the student refused (McCormack, 1985).

Question

The following questions serve to guide this research.
What is the prevalence of sexual harassment at Virginia
Tech?   What is the frequency of occurrence of sexual
harassment, the type of incidents involved, the level of
seriousness, the primary relationship of the faculty or
staff member involved, and the class level of the student
when the incident occurred? What is the awareness level of
Virginia Tech students concerning institutional policy and
campus resources as they relate to sexual harassment?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to discover insight into
the frequency of occurence, the type of incidents, the
seriousness of the harassment on the campus of Virginia

Tech, and the awareness level of students concerning sexual harassment.

"Much useful information has been obtained in surveys of university students regarding their experiences of and reactions to sexual harassment in academic settings" (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983). The students provide information on different aspects of sexual harassment.

Definition of Terms

The definitions given below are for words present in the literature review and in the design of the study. Operational definitions help to explain the intended meaning of the words.

Body Language

Body language encompasses leering at one's body or standing too close (Adams et al., 1983).

Explicit Sexual Propositions

Sexual propositions include clear invitations for a sexual encounter but contain no threats or promises (Adams et al., 1983).

Hostile Environment

An intimidating or offensive working environment that unreasonably interferes with an individual's work

performance (Dziech & Weiner, 1984).

Invitations

These are personal invitations for dates, but where sexual expectations are not stated (Adams et al., 1983)

Physical Advances

Physical advances include kissing, hugging, pinching, and/or fondling (Adams et al., 1983).

Quid Pro Quo

This type of harassment encompasses a supervisor who has made or threatened to make a decision affecting the victim's employment based on whether the victim submits to sexual demands (Dziech & Weiner, 1984).

Sexist Comments

Sexist comments are jokes or remarks that are stereotypical or derogatory to members of one sex (Adams et al., 1983).

Sexual Bribery

A sexual bribe is an explicit sexual proposition that includes or strongly implies promise of rewards for complying or threats of punishment for refusing (Adams et al., 1983).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined by EEOC regulation as: "Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Unwelcome is the key word in determining whether sexual harassment has occurred in a given situation" (Perry, 1993, p. 407).

Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964

A federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in employment. It has been held to include sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination (Dziech & Weiner, 1984).

Title IX, 1972 Education Amendments

A federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education. Sexual harassment has been included as a form of sex discrimination. Complaints may be filed with any Federal agency which grants assistance to the school or a private lawsuit may be initiated (Dziech & Weiner, 1984).

Title 25 of the Code of Federal Regulations

Sexual harassment does not refer to occasional compliments: rather, it refers to behavior '"which is not welcome, which is personlly offensive and debilitates

morale, interfering with the work effectiveness of its
victims and their co-workers"' (Perry, 1993).

Undue Attention

Undue attention is defined as a person being overly
helpful, too friendly, too personal, or flirtatious (Adams
et al., 1983).

Verbal Sexual Advances

These are general verbal expressions of sexual interest
that include comments on appearance, flirtatious remarks,
and asking one out for a date (Adams et al., 1983).

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters that correspond
to the structure of the study. Chapter 1 includes the
statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and
defines terms utilized throughout the study. Chapter 2 is
composed of the literature that is currently known about the
problem under consideration. Chapter 3 provides the
methodology that describes how the study was designed to
answer the research question. All the steps that were
undertaken to investigate the question under consideration
and method of handling and presenting data are included.
Chapter 4 presents the findings. Last of all, Chapter 5

summarizes the study, offers implications, conclusions, and suggests recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Extent of the Problem on Campus

The first accounts of sexual harassment were discovered in the mid to late 1970s (Gutek, 1985). Dziech and Weiner (1990), in one of the first comprehensive studies found that thirty percent of women students reported having experienced sexual harassment by male faculty. But thousands of stories of students being sexually harassed by their professors remain untold, "because higher education keeps skeletons in the closet, and because few except the victims understand the seriousness of the problem" (Dziech & Weiner, 1990, p. 10-11).

"It is the power differential and/or the woman's reaction to the behavior that are the critical variables" (Paludi & Barickman, 1991, p. 10). A major reason for not speaking up about sexual harassment is fear of academic reprisal (Gutek, 1985). Women tend to be targets of sexual harassment due to institutional power structures and "deeply embedded cultural biases" (Paludi & Barickman, 1991, p. 22). They have been socially repressed. They are subordinate and have much less power and authority.

Forms of Sexual Harassment

Definitions of sexual harassment are important. They serve to educate the college campus. Definitions vary between campuses, but there are some common themes. They include "the misuse of differential power, concern for the academic environment, and also include a range of behaviors from sexist language to physical assault" (Somers, 1982).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) covers the forms of sexual harassment most often "defended on the grounds of 'academic freedom'" (Paludi & Barickman, 1991, P. 3). The EEOC states:

> Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when...(3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. (p. 3)

Unwelcome sexual behavior does not have to be repeated to be labeled sexual harassment. Harassment varies in intensity and types. The following is only a partial list: a professor grabbing a student's breast; staring up a student's skirt; frequently commenting on a student's personal appearance; using a "male vs. female" tone in

discussion; sexual innuendoes in class; persistently
emphasizing sexuality in all contexts (Dziech & Weiner,
1990); telling lewd jokes; displaying nude pictures; sexual
advances; and requests for sexual favors (Mondschein &
Greene, 1986).

Federal Guidelines

There are two federal statutes that prohibit academic
sexual harassment as a form of sexual discrimination in
higher education: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
and Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972.

Title VII prohibits discrimination based upon sex in
the terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. It is
relevant to sexual harassment on campus because it includes
student workers. The EEOC (1980) set legal guidelines on
sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a violation of
Title VII and an employer is liable for any acts that it
"'knows or should have known about, unless it can show that
it took immediate and appropriate corrective action'"
(Dziech & Weiner, 1990, p. 19). This means that management
has the responsibility to be aware of what is happening in
the workplace. Managers can individually be sued. "By
applying the Title VII guidelines to an educational setting,
it is apparent that it would be illegal to require

submission to sexually harassing behavior to be a condition for the successful completion of a course of study" (Mondschein & Greene, 1986, p. 58).

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in institutions receiving federal funds. It mandates an environment free of discrimination and prohibits students being sexually harassed by faculty. Title IX specifies that institutions must develop grievance procedures and designate an employee to coordinate the responsibilities under Title IX which includes the investigation of allegations of violations. Students have redress for alleged sexual harassment (Education Amendments of 1972, 1982). Complaints may be filed with any agency which grants assistance to the school or a private suit may be initiated. The suit may result in injunctive relief and possibly a reward of damages. Agencies can require the institution to either correct the problem or lose their federal funds.

Title IX and Title VII Rulings

Between Title IX and Title VII, the statutes seem to secure sexual harassment of students as a form of sex discrimination (Dziech & Weiner, 1990).

One of the first lawsuits brought against a university for sexual harassment was in 1977 at Yale. It was a Title

IX ruling that addressed sexual harassment of students,
<u>Alexander v. Yale University</u> (1980). A female student
brought suit against the university alleging sexual
harassment. She alleged a poor grade she received resulted
from rejecting an "A" from the professor in exchange for
repeated sexual favors, including sexual intercourse. She
found it impossible to continue playing the flute and
consequently, abandoned her study, thus dropping her desired
career. She complained to Yale officials but was
discouraged and intimidated by unresponsive administrators.
Failure to establish sexual harassment complaint procedures
denied equal educational opportunity to students. The suit
asked for an adequate grievance procedure. The claims were
dismissed by the District Court on grounds the charges were
inadequate. The District Court did maintain if sexual
harassment occurs, it may constitute sex discrimination
which is prohibited under Title IX of the Education
Amendments of 1972 (1982). The U.S. Court of Appeals
dismissed the 1980 original complaint. The court held the
student failed to prove her case and Yale had addressed her
main concern of establishing a grievance procedure. After
the publicity of the Yale case, reports from colleges began
to appear (Reilly et al, 1986). The suit was not upheld in
court, but it did focus attention on the issue. Groups
began to investigate the problem on campuses.

In <u>Henson v. Dundee</u> (1982), the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit said that sexual harassment that creates a hostile or offensive environment is an arbitrary barrier to sexual equality (Perry, 1993).

<u>Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson</u> (1986) involved a female bank employee who claimed she had been subjected to constant sexual harassment for four years. She claimed this was a violation of Title VII. The District Court found the employee did not prove the harassment was a violation. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court where it was unanimously affirmed that sexual harassment includes those cases in which the individual is subjected to an offensive, discriminatory work environment (a hostile environment) (Perry, 1993). The work environment includes classrooms, faculty and staff offices, libraries, residence halls, commons areas, and also off-campus locations where university and students gather.

In 1992, the Supreme Court awarded monetary damages for the first time under Title IX in <u>Franklin v. Gwinett County Public Schools</u>. The ruling signifies that students may enjoy the same protection in school as employers do in the workplace.

<u>Patricia H. v. Berkeley Unified School District</u> broke new ground for Title IX. It cited significant implications for colleges. The ruling claimed sexual harassment is a

form of a '"hostile and intimidating environment"' (Gehring,
1993, p. 6). It took guidance from Meritor Savings Bank,
FSB v. Vinson. '"The same rules should apply when a teacher
sexually harasses and abuses a student"' (Gehring, 1993, p.
6).

If courts apply precedents set forth by Title VII cases
dealing with the hostile environment, there will be an
increase in litigation (Gehring, 1993). The courts have
been prone to apply Title VII reasonings to Title IX cases.
The U.S. Supreme Court in Franklin "said that a student
should enjoy the same protection in school that employees do
at work" (Gehring, 1993/94, p. 9).

Recommendations

What can campuses do to eliminate sexual harassment?
The best way is to take steps to prevent sexual harassment
before it happens (Gehring, 1993/94). Few colleges have
implemented programs that take an active approach to dealing
with sexual harassment. Most incidents go unreported, even
when a grievance procedure exists (Paludi & Barickman,
1991). The campus needs to be informed what sexual
harassment is, the policies in effect, the need to report
incidents, and the consequences of sexual harassment. The
issue of sexual harassment should be confronted in

professional development, staff training, and educational programming. Awareness and education of the problem needs to be increased in the college commmunity.

Advance preventive planning and training that involves the academic community is a necessity. Institutions need to implement clear and effective: reporting and investigative procedures (Paludi & Barickman, 1991); awareness programs that inform and educate; institutional policy; and grievance and sanction procedures (Mondschein & Greene, 1986).

Specific recommendations include:

1. Teleconference with small group-facilitated discussions

2. Brown bag lunch series to review the current policy and/or develop a policy on sexual harassment

3. Sponsor a Sexual Harassment Awareness Week where you encourage the prevention and reporting of sexual harassment

4. Toll-free telephone number where students can call and share their stories with trained volunteers

5. Utilize case studies where there is role playing and small and large group discussions (NASPA Teleconference, 1992).

6. Distribute informative brochures

7. Sponsor campus workshops

8. Facilitate open discussions at meetings

9. Make recent reading material available

10. Develop appropriate sanctions

11. Inform everyone of their right to bring forth a claim of sexual harassment

12. Include the steps to be taken and the appropriate people to contact (Perry, 1993)

For these recommendations to work, the motivation and backing must come from top administrators.

An established policy on sexual harassment must be in place and there must be a set of procedures to implement the policy. The policy statement should be inclusive to cover prohibition against sexual harassment in the educational environment. The definition of sexual harassment should be included to inform the campus community. It should be established that conduct is actionable by the institution. The policy statement should be tied in with grievance procedures to enforce the policy and allow for termination of tenure (Dziech & Weiner, 1984). Allegations of harassment must be pursued and evidence must be acted upon. Sexual harassment incidents should be included in performance appraisals and results must be acted upon. Professional behavior should be promoted. Appropriate protocols should be established to assure that response efforts are comprehensive and coordinated. A list of resource people should also be maintained.

Conclusion

"It seems reasonable to suggest that the only integrative solution is institutional and organizational change (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). It is important that student affairs personnel be aware of the issue. Students are likely to bring claims of sexual harassment to student affairs practitioners. Practitioners may have the responsibility of remedying specific claims, must be informed about available options, and are in a position to provide preventive workshops to students (Perry, 1993). Students must be informed that "sexual harassment is sex discrimination, is illegal, damaging to the academic community, refers to a broad range of behaviors, and may occur as single or repeated incidents" (Dziech & Weiner, 1990, p. 21). It is time to take seriously the issue of sexual harassment so institutions may pursue the goal of providing an environment for students where "they may prepare to achieve their educational, personal and career goals" (Mondschein & Greene, 1986, p. 59). Sexual harassment is not just an employment issue. It is an academic freedom issue as well where students have the right to work and learn in a harassment free environment (Kaplin, 1985; Mondschein & Greene, 1986).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Description of Research Requirements

The chosen methodology was based on the exploratory nature of the study. The study required a methodology that was qualitative in nature with in-depth description to allow for inquiry that began with the researcher's general understanding of certain aspects of the topic under study.

Sample

The sample consisted of undergraduate female students attending Virginia Tech at the time of the study. The participants sampled were members of a woman's organization on campus. The organizations were selected from the Directory of Student Organizations.

Instrument

To assist participants in recalling incidents of sexual harassment, a structured interview format was developed and administered. The framework of the interview questions were based on the sexual harassment survey created by Allen and Bessai (Dziech & Weiner, 1990). The interview guide is shown in Appendix A. The participants were questioned to

recall and describe personal experiences and observations of
sexual harassment at Virginia Tech. Additionally, the
participants were asked to describe the perceived level of
seriousness of sexual harassment, the primary relationship
of the faculty or staff member, the class level when the
incident occurred, and the awareness level of students
concerning sexual harassment issues on campus. The
interviews were not identical because unique probing
questions, based on students' responses, were used to elicit
additional information. An interview guide was used to
ensure systematic inquiry about issues pertinent to the
study. The interviews lasted a half hour to an hour. The
interviews were terminated when the participants offered no
new information.

Procedures

The contact person of each organization was sent a
letter describing the interview topic and the purpose of the
research. A follow-up call was made to the contact person
to establish a date and time for the focus group. The study
began with a pilot study and used Appendix A. Focus group
interviews where general questions of the participants were
conducted. A consent form that included a definition of
sexual harassment was given to each participant.

The pilot study was conducted in the presence of committee member, Susanna Short, to obtain information relevant to the researcher and consisted of four undergraduate females. Interview questions and guide were then modified from the initial focus group to help remind the researcher of areas to be covered in the investigation and direct the investigator toward the topics under study. The remaining interviews were comprised of three to fourteen individuals per focus group, used the interview questions outlined in Appendix B, and were tape recorded to aid in the interpretation of the findings.

Consistency

The pilot study was conducted by trying out the proposed questions on a group of participants. The pilot study enabled the researcher to assess the appropriateness and practicality of the data collection approach. The pilot study was conducted in the presence of committee member, Susanna Short, to aid in the interpretation of findings and the formation of interview questions for the interview guide outlined in Appendix B. The interview guide was developed to help direct the researcher toward the objectives under study. The guide was an outline of the topics and sub-topics to be covered during the focus group interviews.

To obtain more complete detail and increase the participants' willingness to give the relevant information, participants were given an operational definition of sexual harassment at the time of the focus group interview. Participants were asked if they understood the definition. Clarification was given if needed.

Precautions to prepare against personal bias were taken. An objective advisor was present during the practice session. Participants were asked both why and why not to various questions. Lastly, responses were generated from all members of the focus group by asking various questions that would include the participation of everyone.

Analysis of Data

All five focus groups were recorded and extensive field notes were taken during and immediately following each interview. Data collection and interpretation took place simultaneously. All written and recorded information served as data for analysis. The data were analyzed using comparative analysis. The researcher reviewed each interview and formed ideas about conceptual categories based on students' responses to interview questions. Category content that developed represented recurring themes.

Categories were formulated to develop an understanding of the setting and people under study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Description of Sample

The participants in the study were drawn from female students who were members of women's organizations at Virginia Tech. Forty-seven women participated. The presidents of the organizations were contacted initially by mail to inform them of the purpose of the research and how they could contribute to the study. A follow-up telephone call was made to ensure participation and to schedule a session with the organization's members. Five out of seven groups agreed to participate. All of the participants were undergraduate students. The study was designed to include graduate students, however, none participated.

Interviewing Process

The women were interviewed in focus groups. Each taped interview lasted approximately one half hour to one hour. The primary researcher conducted all sessions. The primary researcher was trained to conduct focus group interviews during a pilot study that had four participants and an observer. The interviews were conducted in a university

conference room or in meeting rooms in the student center.
A letter of consent, which was signed by each participant,
contained a definition of sexual harassment. The definition
was used to clarify the types of harassment on which the
study focused. All data were collected during a two-week
period.

Data Analysis

The researcher drew on research to form the interview
questions into themes. Data collection and interpretation
took place simultaneously. The researcher assessed the
responses as the interview was conducted to determine if
more probing questions were appropriate. The responses were
collected and arranged to correspond with each question in
the interview guide.

Answers were grouped together based on responses to
interview questions. Similar responses to open-ended
questions were grouped together according to a theme. One-
time responses were also reported. Numerical responses were
collected, totaled, and put into charts for comparative
analysis.

The researcher drew on research to determine if
responses were consistent and could be relied upon to form
valid conclusions. Each interview was reviewed and

responses categorized based on the recurring themes identified. The data were judged to be reliable due to the common elements obtained from different groups and the relevance to prior research that discussed similar observations.

Findings

Frequency of Occurrence

Approximately 25% of the women interviewed had come into contact with sexual harassment at Virginia Tech. Six women had experienced sexual harassment and six women had observed sexual harassment on campus. But despite the fact that experiences and observations of sexual harassment on the campus of Virginia Tech were reported in each group, more than half of the students felt that sexual harassment was not prevalent on campus. This is illustrated by the fact that thirty students out of forty-seven reported that sexual harassment was not prevalent. Students reported that sexual harassment was not prevalent either because they had not experienced it personally, had never observed it on campus, or had not heard about an incident occurring.

The women who expressed that sexual harassment was prevalent had experienced or had heard about an incident. Many of these women had lived in female residence halls

where they had been sensitized to the subject. Ten students
cited Virginia Tech as being "a male-oriented school where
it is likely that sexual harassment often occurs."   Last of
all, four women reported having read about a fellow Virginia
Tech student who was suing her professor for making sex a
requirement in order to obtain a passing grade.

Type of Incidents

For those that had experienced or observed sexual
harassment, the type of incident spanned from unwanted
sexual statements to unwanted physical advances. Sexist
comments that included jokes and remarks that were
stereotypical or derogatory to women seemed to occur
frequently. One woman said, "Some professors have sexist
attitudes toward women and we feel that we must prove
ourselves in class." One professor was reported to have
asked personal information concerning the student's
relationships, boyfriend, etc. Another student reported an
incident that involved a professor asking a student out on a
date.   Another professor moved his desk close to the
student in an advising session according to one reported
account. When the student moved her desk away, "the
professor moved his desk closer again." Finally, there was
an incident reported where a professor put his hand on the
student's knee. These episodes constituted the full range

of reports by the students interviewed of sexual harassment
incidents on the campus of Virginia Tech.

Level of Seriousness

The level of seriousness had not gone to the extreme
where sex was a part of the incident with the group of women
studied. Most frequently, sexual harassment took the form
of inappropriate comments. Statements such as sexist
comments made in class, comments about a student's
appearance, and requests for personal information were the
dominant reported instances of sexual harassment at Virginia
Tech for the women interviewed. One-time incidents included
a professor sitting close to a student in an advising
session, a professor asking a student out on a date, a
professor taking a photograph for his computer, and lastly,
a professor placing his hand on a student's knee.

Relationship

In the groups studied, the majority of harassers, ten
out of twelve, were professors whom the women had for class.
In one of the instances, the professor was acting in an
advisor role and in another instance the harasser was a
graduate teaching assistant. "The GTA was close in age to
me," said one female student, "and may not have known the
guidelines on sexual harassment policy and relationships
with students." "I told him his comments about the way I
look were inappropriate and made me feel uncomfortable and

he stopped." According to the students, "the professors should have known there was a university policy prohibiting sexual harassment."

Class Level

Incidents among the participants studied indicated that sexual harassment occurred at all class levels. There were, however, twice as many reported incidents at the lower class levels when compared to the upper two class levels. At the freshmen level there were five incidents, three at the sophomore level, and two incidents each at the junior and senior levels. No incidents were recorded among master's students because all the participants were undergraduates. The women and the data offered no explanations as to why more incidents occurred among first and second year students. One may speculate that the first and second year students were easy prey for sexual harassment because they were more naive or that there were more first and second year students who were participants in the interviews than third and fourth year students.

Awareness Level

At least half of the students in the focus groups were exposed to some kind of medium of information on sexual harassment. This was a bit surprising because even though the women were exposed to sexual harassment information, over half the women expressed that sexual harassment was not

prevalent at Virginia Tech. The majority of women, thirty-three out of forty-seven, know there is a policy concerning sexual harassment; however, most were "not aware of its contents" or that the policy is being revised. Over half of the participants, twenty-eight out of forty-seven, have heard a speaker on the subject of sexual harassment in their respective organizations' meetings or in their residence halls. In most cases, the speaker was a member of the Dean of Students office. Literature on sexual harassment was another resource reported but one that was reported to be less effective in reaching the students. Only eighteen out of forty-seven students reported having seen literature on campus. One woman said university published literature was distributed by her architecture professor in class.

More Attention

The women reported that more attention needs to be focused on sexual harassment issues at Virginia Tech. Some students went as far to say that the administration needs to be more honest about what occurs on campus. The students feel important information such as the frequency of sexual harassment on campus is kept from them.

The women expressed a strong need for everyone in the college community to be educated about sexual harassment. Men are believed to not realize that verbal statements such as sexist comments can be sexual harassment. Students do

not know what constitutes sexual harassment. "They believe
it is always blatant, like rape." Some women thought that
sexual harassment should be defined along the lines of what
it is and what it is not. Other women, however, took a
stand against this idea. The women said, "people need to
relax." They argued the definitions would cause people to
be afraid to talk to one another. The women proposed the
university conduct a study to determine whether there is a
problem with sexual harassment. If there is, the university
should make plans according to the findings, for example,
adjust programming to fit the needs of the campus. Other
ideas surfaced for educating the college community. Some
students suggested seminars and discussions on sexual
harassment for faculty and administrators while others felt
everyone in a superior situation should participate in
training. A superior position would include anyone who
supervises or teaches others such as administrators,
faculty, graduate assistants, and students who hold an
office in an organization. One woman related that a service
fraternity has a sexual harassment committee that works with
the Dean of Students office. Each committee member
experiences six hours of training.

The majority of women reported that information needs
to be distributed at orientation in the form of literature,
discussion groups, or skits. Date rape is discussed but not

sexual harassment. Presenting information at orientation is a good way to reach incoming freshmen. The students also expressed a need to carry the information through once the students arrive on campus. One idea is to have programs on sexual harassment in residence halls.

There is one last area the women felt needs attention. The majority of women interviewed wanted to know who to contact, where they should go, and what to do if confronted with the issue. One woman, who was a recent victim of sexual harassment, wanted to tell someone but felt that she had no one to turn to for help. The women reported a need to know that help is available.

Conclusions

The results of this study appear to show that sexual harassment is part of the environment at Virginia Tech. Just as the literature revealed, stories of sexual harassment remain untold on campus because there is a perception that the administration keeps issues quiet and few people understand the seriousness of the problem. The women interviewed see themselves as targets for harassment because of cultural biases. Many expressed that Virginia Tech exhibits the feeling of a male-oriented school where women typically have much less power and authority and where women feel as if they must prove themselves.

To combat these issues, the women, like reports in the

literature, cited ways to deal with the problem of sexual harassment. Above all, a proactive approach needs to be taken. This can be accomplished through professional development, staff training, and educational programming. There needs to be an increase in awareness and education in the college community. The campus needs to be informed of what sexual harassment is and the policies in effect. An inclusive university policy statement that contains the definition of sexual harassment should round out the plan to deal with the increasing problem of sexual harassment on campus today.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This exploratory study was conducted to examine the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment on the college campus of Virginia Tech. The purpose was to identify the frequency of occurence, the type of incidents, the seriousness of the harassment, and the awareness level of students concerning sexual harassment issues. To gain insight into sexual harassment at Virginia Tech, forty-seven college women from women's organizations were interviewed in focus groups and asked about sexual harassment issues at Virginia Tech. The data were analyzed using categories formed based on students' responses to interview questions. The categories consisted of recurring themes.

The results of this study appeared to support the literature in that sexual harassment exists on campus. Twenty-five percent of the women interviewed had come into contact with sexual harassment as compared to 30% cited in the literature. Given the total student population of women on Virginia Tech's campus, the 25% accounts for approximately two thousand women being affected by sexual harassment. This represents a significant number of women

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who experience sexual harassment which should be of concern to university administrators.

Even though there were experiences and observations of sexual harassment on campus, more than half of the women felt that sexual harassment was not prevalent on campus. The students either had not experienced it personally, had never observed it on campus, or had not heard about an incident. For those that had experienced or observed sexual harassment, the type of incident spanned from unwanted sexual statements to unwanted physical advances. The sexual harassment incidents included sexist comments, undue attention, body language, physical advances, and verbal sexual advances.

The majority of the harassers were male professors that the women had for class. One harasser was a graduate teaching assistant who made inappropriate remarks about a student's appearance. When the GTA was confronted by the student, the harassment stopped.

The sexual harassment among the participants occurred at all class levels. There were, however, twice as many reported incidents at the lower class levels when compared to the upper two class levels.

At least half of the students interviewed were exposed to some kind of medium of information on sexual harassment. The majority of women know that there is a university policy

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statement concerning sexual harassment and have heard a
speaker on the issue. Considerably fewer women have seen
literature on sexual harassment.

The data relating to the degree of sexual harassment
and observations by women that did not feel it was prevalent
on campus creates an apparent contradiction. These
conflicting positions seem to indicate that women who have
not experienced sexual harassment may feel that it is not a
problem. Another point, which is related in the research,
is that many women who experience sexual harassment choose,
for a variety of reasons, not to talk about the subject.
Each of these points of view tend to create the perception
that sexual harassment must not be a serious problem. The
fallacy of this argument is the data and the research
clearly state there is a problem of some proportion when as
many as two thousand women on a single campus could be
affected.

Last of all, the results show that more attention needs
to be focused on sexual harassment issues at Virginia Tech.
Once the subject was brought into the open, the women
suggested that university officials may not recognize the
degree of sexual harassment or may even attempt to conceal
its existence. The students interviewed felt that the
administration needs to be more honest about what occurs on
campus, that the entire college community needs to be

educated about sexual harassment, and that women need to know who to contact and what to do if confronted with sexual harassment. The fact that over half the women said it was not prevalent should not be mistaken as a signal that sexual harassment is not a problem to be taken seriously. The women who felt it was not prevalent may have come to their conclusion for a variety of reasons. Future research should attempt to clarify and broaden the understanding of this issue.

Implications

The findings of this study are both useful and revealing and send a message to the administration. Even though this was an exploratory study, the results show that sexual harassment is an important issue on campus that needs attention. Female students are coming into contact with sexual harassment at all class levels, however, the victims do not know who to contact or what to do when confronted with the issue. A college environment that contains cultural biases, a male-orientation, and an administration that does not share all of the facts concerning sexual harassment is one that needs to take a proactive approach to change.

The results of the study serve as a base for which the

administration can use to enact a more revealing study of the problem on campus. The administration should go into more depth with the categories utilized. Information concerning frequency of sexual harassment on campus, the seriousness of the incidents, and the class levels targeted are all important. Detailed information concerning the awareness of students can lead to discovering where and what kind of resources need to be distributed at Virginia Tech. Additions to the study including information on college and major may reveal areas on campus that need more attention. This study serves as a launching pad for further research into the area of sexual harassment.

Conclusions

The results of this study can be summarized into three conclusions. First, sexual harassment does occur on the campus of Virginia Tech. Twenty-five percent of the women interviewed had come into contact with sexual harassment as either a victim or an observer. The harassment occurred at all class levels and mainly by the students' male professors.

Even though sexual harassment occurs, the majority of women in the study have not experienced it in any form. Reasons for this may include the students did not want to

divulge such personal information to a stranger or a group of peers, the students did not understand what constitutes sexual harassment, or sexual harassment is just not prevalent at Virginia Tech.

Finally, the awareness level of the campus community concerning sexual harassment needs to be increased. It is important to educate everyone on campus about the issue of sexual harassment. In particular, the women need to know what to do and who to contact if confronted with sexual harassment. The administrators and faculty need to go through professional development and staff training concerning the issue. And everyone must be made aware of what constitutes sexual harassment and the university policy that is in effect.

Recommendations

Based on the exploratory nature of this study, additional research is necessary to more fully understand sexual harassment issues at Virginia Tech. Further study could involve distributing surveys to a large number of women to determine how frequently sexual harassment occurs on campus.

With regard to the sample, it would be beneficial if demographics of the participants were made available. The

researcher should include information on class level, race, college, and major. This information would reveal differences or themes across the demographic variables as it relates to sexual harassment. For instance, the researcher should determine the class level of students in the focus groups. This information would enable the researcher to identify if women of certain class levels are more susceptable to sexual harassment. It would also aid the university in directing its attention toward informative program development.

With specific regard to the sample of students to participate in the study, more women should be interviewed. The collection method should include more than using a directory of women's organizations in order to increase the reliability of results. A better method would be to randomly select participants from a list of all women students enrolled at Virginia Tech. This way the researcher could generalize the findings across campus instead of across the group interviewed. The students should not be made aware of the topic under study prior to the interview. Some of the students were aware of the topic prior to the interview which may have created preconceptions and may have led some to not attend the sessions. Sending a letter first to the leader of the group and then making a personal phone call to set-up the interview proved helpful. The leader was

forewarned about the reason for the telephone call and could easily decide whether and when to participate.

It might be beneficial to schedule all of the interviews in the same room. The environment would remain constant. It might also help the researcher in feeling comfortable with the surroundings.

In summary, the study was interesting and could prove to be useful in the present and in the future. Further research should include more women and more detail to discover the effect sexual harassment has on the environment of Virginia Tech.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Have you experienced any acts of sexual harassment at VA
   Tech?
           If no, have you observed acts of sexual harassment
           between others?
           If yes, have you experienced sexual harassment
           rarely or a lot?

2. Please describe the sexual harassment incident.

           *unwanted sexual statements
           *unwanted personal attention
           *unwanted sexual proposition
           *unwanted physical or sexual advances

3. Please describe the perceived level of seriousness.
   What has been the frequency of occurrence (one time or
   more)?

4. Please describe the primary relationship of the faculty
   or staff member?

           *graduate assistant
           *professor/instructor
           *advisor
           *dean
           *supervisor of university employment
           *other administrator, academic
            professor/university employee

5. In what class level were you when the incident
   occurred?

APPENDIX B

REVISED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Do you think sexual harassment is prevalent at Virginia Tech?
        Why or why not?

2. Have you experienced any acts of sexual harassment at Virginia Tech?
        If no, have you observed acts of sexual harassment between others?
        If yes, have you experienced sexual harassment rarely or a lot?

3. Please describe the sexual harassment incident.

        *unwanted sexual statements
        *unwanted personal attention
        *unwanted sexual proposition
        *unwanted physical or sexual advances

4. Please describe the perceived level of seriousness. What has been the frequency of occurrence (one time or more)?

5. Please describe the primary relationship of the faculty or staff member?

        *graduate assistant
        *professor/instructor
        *advisor
        *dean
        *supervisor of university employment
        *other administrator, academic
         professor/university employee

6. In what class level were you when the incident occurred?

7. Are you aware that there is a policy prohibiting sexual harassment on campus?

8. Have you seen literature or attended a meeting on campus that discusses what sexual harassment is and your rights as a student?

9. Do you think more attention needs to be focused on the issue?

VITA

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