

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

AAUW Educational Foundation Research Finds That Nearly Two-Thirds of College Students Have Experienced Some Type of Sexual Harassment.

By Liz Tascio

on Campus

Haley Pollack notices it every day on her Indiana University campus: catcalls, sexual comments, “accidental” touching. Some of her fellow students brush it off. But to Pollack, it’s sexual harassment, and it’s time to draw the line.

Pollack was a freshman in college when a teaching assistant offered her a high grade in exchange for a sex act. A year later, she reported the conversation to school authorities, anonymously.

Now, the senior is taking a stand. Pollack helps lead a new anti-harassment program on her campus funded by a grant from AAUW. The Campus Action Project (CAP), along with a report from the AAUW Educational Foundation, *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus*, is a part of AAUW’s multiyear, programmatic focus, Education as the Gateway to Women’s Economic Security.

“Students come to campus to get an education,” says Karen Schofield-Leca, director of the AAUW Leadership and Training Institute (LTI) and of CAP. “If the climate on the campus is such that they are uncomfortable, distracted, [or] distraught, that impacts their ability to be successful in getting an education.”

Drawing the Line found almost two-thirds of students say they’ve been sexually harassed. They’ve had sexual rumors spread about them, forced into unwanted physical contact, and spied on. Many—more women than men—said the harassment damaged their education and college experience, which can have economic consequences later.

LTI awarded \$5,000 grants to 11 schools through CAP to help students understand and combat sexual harassment. (For more information about the

programs, see Campus Action Projects 2005-2006, page 9.)

“[It’s] a cultural phenomenon that seems to have taken on a life of its own. It is so big, so common, that [students] are tolerating it,” says Elena Silva, director of research, AAUW Educational Foundation.

“You don’t want to offend him, which is crazy to think. [But] you don’t want to look like a person who can’t take a joke.”

—Dianne Memory, senior,
Penn State University

Finding a Voice

Last May, the Educational Foundation and Harris Interactive surveyed undergraduates at community colleges and four-year schools; at private and public universities and colleges; in big cities and smaller towns. It asked the same questions of male and female students, and of students of all races and sexual orientations.

Students said harassment happens everywhere: at parties, in classrooms, in residence halls. It comes from peers, faculty, and staff. They also described a cycle—some of those who were harassed admitted to behaving the same way toward others.

Harassment varied from emotional manipulation to forced physical contact.

“People who lived in the same hall as me in the dorms started spreading

rumors about my sex life, which were not even close to true. They also spread condoms around my room,” shares a female in her third year of school.

Less than 10 percent of those who said they’d been harassed had reported the experience to someone in authority. More than one-third hadn’t told anyone.

The top reason students gave for not reporting was that it wasn’t “a big deal”—yet they said harassment made them feel “horrible,” “embarrassed,” “violated,” and “paranoid.” Some students lost sleep over it, and some said they changed their daily routines or dropped classes. About one in 10 said they were disappointed in their college experience because of harassment. About 3 percent transferred to other schools.

“I felt violated and could not focus on my classes. I also felt limited in where I could go on campus,” says another student.

The CAP programs teach students that if something makes them feel, as one female third-year student puts it, “self-conscious, pissed off, and concerned, in that order,” then the student can speak up and draw a line.

Pennsylvania State University senior Dianne Memory says she didn’t know how to do that when she was a freshman. One night, Memory was at a friend’s apartment when a man there started making sexual remarks to her. She tried to avoid him by leaving the room, but, unfortunately, in the end, he raped her.

“I wouldn’t respond to his comments. I moved away from him, but I didn’t come right out and say, ‘You shouldn’t be saying that to me,’” Memory says. “You don’t want to offend him, which is so crazy to think. [But] you don’t want to look like a person who can’t take a joke.”

After the rape, Memory thought there was no one to turn to. A year and a half later, she found support through her women's studies program.

Now, the confident and well-spoken senior works with her school's CAP team to let students know the campus has a 24-hour hotline, a women's center, a Title IX officer, and a host of other resources.

On her own, she's been giving in-class presentations about harassment and rape. She stresses that victims of rape aren't to blame, but says she wants people to learn to recognize dangerous situations and respond.

"You should be able to say no," Memory says. "If I had the education that I have now, I would have seen those warning signs."

The CAP program at Penn State reaches students in small groups and airs student-created public service announcements. It also includes print ads and T-shirts with the message that students can do something about sexual harassment.

Many students who took the survey requested an option besides officially reporting harassment: an anonymous, web-based reporting system.

Georgia Southern University wants to meet students on their terms. The school's website, funded through CAP, goes online this month.

"Students certainly aren't, in general, opening up and saying, 'This happened to me,'" says Lori Amy, CAP advisor at Georgia Southern and the school's director of the women's and gender studies program. The website will provide a safe place to report it or learn about options, she said.

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Campus Action Projects 2005-2006

The goal of the Campus Action Project (CAP) is to create action on college campuses. AAUW selected these 11 schools based on the strength of their proposals, their demonstrated efforts to proactively address campus sexual harassment, and their commitment to doing even more to create the best possible learning environment for their students. During spring 2006, each CAP team received a grant of \$5,000 and technical assistance from AAUW to implement a program addressing one of the five areas of activity. These projects will help students, faculty, and administrators understand the scope of the problem, raise awareness, and design effective programming to reduce sexual harassment. Additional resources on sexual harassment can be found on the AAUW website at www.aauw.org/campus_connection/cap_harassment_resource.cfm.

School, City	Program Theme/Focus
Assessing Campus Policies and Procedures	
University of North Texas Denton, Texas	UNT = Harassment Free
Campus Dialogue	
Indiana University Bloomington, Ind.	SHAPE up! Sexual Harassment Awareness Peer Education
Stoney Brook University Stoney Brook, N.Y.	SBU Campus UNITED Against Harassment
University of Akron Akron, Ohio	Make Our Campus Harassment-Free
Communications and the Media	
Mississippi University for Women Columbus, Miss.	Sexual Harassment ... Speak Out
Pennsylvania State University State College, Pa.	Changing the Campus Culture: A Multimedia Service Campaign to Stop Sexual Harassment
Examining Student Experiences	
Alfred University Alfred, N.Y.	Sexual Harassment Campus Action Project
Chemeketa Community College Salem, Ore.	Identifying and Planning for a Harassment-Free Environment at Chemeketa Community College
Louisiana State University Baton Rouge, La.	Project STOP: Student Team for Outreach and Prevention: An Anti-Harassment Coalition
University of Central Florida Orlando, Fla.	UCF Assesses Sexual Harassment and Develops Interventions
Web-Based Tools	
Georgia Southern University Statesboro, Ga.	Sexual Harassment Awareness: Tools and Resources

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The site will include information on harassment, university policies, resources, and an anonymous reporting mechanism. Amy will use student feedback to develop other features, such as discussion boards or chats with student facilitators.

Amy doesn't know yet how the school will follow up on the anonymous reports.

"If someone tells us something, we have an obligation to go look," Amy says. For example, the school could respond to an anonymous complaint about a certain residence hall by doing more anti-harassment programming there, she explains.

Just Part of College Life

Half of male students and about one-third of female students who responded to AAUW's survey admitted to sexually harassing someone in college.

Many don't understand how their behavior affects their peers. Most said they thought it was funny. A third thought the person wanted the attention, and a third said it was just part of college life.

Students who had been harassed said it sometimes took the form of a joke.

"One of my professors always makes sexually offensive jokes towards women," says a female senior. "He doesn't speak about anyone within the class in particular, but his jokes are always about sexual favors women should perform."

Witnesses to harassment—those who laugh because they think they should or those who don't like it but don't speak up—contribute to an environment where harassment is acceptable, says Patricia L. Donat, associate vice president of academic affairs at Mississippi University for Women and the CAP advisor for the school.

"Sexual harassment doesn't occur in a vacuum," Donat explains.

Her school's CAP program reaches out to those silent witnesses. Students at Mississippi have been working with local TV stations, radio stations, and newspapers to publish stories about harassment.

They are also planning interactive skits on campus. As the skits unfold, students in the audience will be asked to say where they would draw the line.

At Indiana University, Pollack and other students are leading peer discussions about what to do in the face of harassment.

The first talk takes advantage of the campus' popular movie night. The film *North Country*, based on the real-life sexual harassment battle of a female iron miner, happens to be on the list.

"[I want to] create that confidence in people so that they can stand up and say that they don't appreciate it and that they don't like it," Pollack says.

Opening the Dialogue

Federal law already bans harassment. But the law doesn't dictate all appropriate behavior, and it shouldn't have to, says AAUW's Silva. Students decide what behaviors they accept and what behaviors they reject.


"We're talking about a cultural shift, and that's not going to happen because somebody told [students] they have to," adds Catherine Hill, senior research associate, AAUW Educational Foundation.

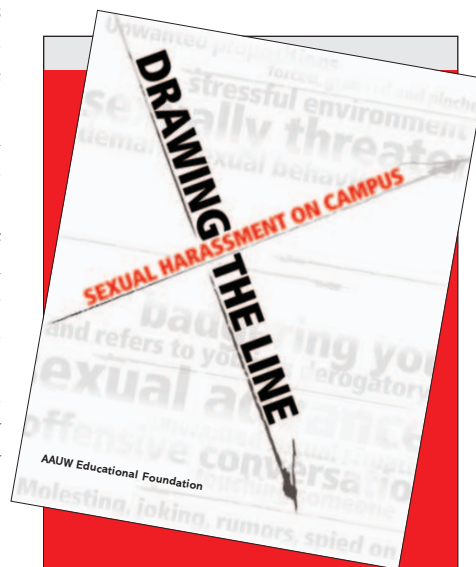
Hill and Silva hope the CAP programs, coupled with survey's findings, will inspire "a more sophisticated dialogue" about harassment. In June, CAP students will present the programs' outcomes at the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders Summit on Sexual Harassment.

"We're not trying ... to draw the line ourselves," Silva emphasizes. "Nor are we suggesting that there is just one single line that can be drawn."

If students agree that boundaries exist, and that it's OK to challenge people who cross them, they will start a groundswell against sexual harassment.

"It's time that people do start talking about it," says Memory, the Penn State senior. "Not just in women's studies classes, not just one time in freshmen orientation.

"That's why I'm doing something about it." 



The Research Report

The AAUW Educational Foundation's new research report, *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus*, presents the most comprehensive research to date on sexual harassment on college campuses. The report supports the AAUW Building a Harassment-Free Campus initiative through related Campus Action Projects, part of AAUW's multiyear, programmatic focus—Education as the Gateway to Women's Economic Security.

To purchase a copy of the report, visit ShopAAUW online or call 800/225-9998. You can also download a PDF of the report at www.aauw.org.

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Liz Tascio is a freelance journalist and editor specializing in social issues. She lives in New York City.