Chapter 1: Digging In

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Sexual harassment is embedded in our government, schools, entertainment, and our culture. But the term "sexual harassment" is relatively new, coming into the lexicon in the 1970s. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as:

> Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. ("Facts" n.d., para. 2)

While this definition is widely recognized, employers and institutions often have more detailed and fine-grained variations. Chapter 2: "Defining It" provides definitions of sexual harassment from a wide range of sources, allowing readers to consider the ways in which institutional culture may impact considerations of sexual harassment even at the definitional level.

Part of the difficulty in defining sexual harassment, however, stems from an inclination to view harassment solely as a legal issue. In her 2007 book, Carrie N. Baker argued that the movement against sexual harassment started with the goal of systemic cultural shifts, but soon became an individual and legal endeavor (p. 6). Viewing sexual harassment as an individual, legal issue is part of the problem with recognition and elimination of sexual harassment. A legalistic, limited understanding distances sexual harassment from broader cultural life.

Another result of the focus on the individual is the tendency to blame the victim. In fact, the EEOC's "Facts about Sexual Harassment" web page suggests that victims of sexual harassment should "inform the harasser directly that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop" (n.d., para. 4). In other words, the EEOC suggests the initial confrontation about sexual harassment should be by the victim to the abuser. One of the challenges this book takes on is that of understanding that sexual harassment is a cultural issue, not an individual, legal one.

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Sexual harassment has made news for decades, but it has not typically been a front-page issue. It became a headline issue in 1991 with *The New York Times* (Section A Page 1) article entitled "Law Professor Accuses Thomas of Sexual Harassment in the 1980s" (Lewis). One day after this headline, Maureen Dowd commented on the dynamics of the Judiciary Committee writing ". . . the story of how members of the all-male Judiciary Committee handled the allegations has touched off an angry explosion among women in legal and political circles" (1991, para. 2). These hearings brought sexual harassment into the light of day, but the impact of the "angry explosion" that Dowd mentioned reached a small audience. In a 2019 interview, Anita Hill recalled "after the hearings, 70 percent — or at least a pretty wide majority of people — thought that I had perjured myself. Most of the people polled, regardless of race, regardless of gender, believed that Clarence Thomas should be confirmed for the Supreme Court" (Bennett, 2019, para. 5). "Many people viewing the hearings," she continued, "didn't even realize that sexual harassment was something that was actionable, that they could file a complaint about. They had no idea what the concept was about." Since 1991, Hill believes things have changed gradually "because people started telling their stories, we started filing complaints, we had lawsuits that were filed, and the public became much more aware" (para. 6).

Almost 30 years after it first made headlines, sexual harassment once again became Section A, Page 1 news with *The New York Times* expose on Harvey Weinstein (Kantor and Twohey, 2019). Beginning with that article, the breadth and depth of Weinstein's purported crimes have been thoroughly chronicled ("Harvey Weinstein," 2019). As Hollywood news intensified, encompassing more and more actors, directors, and others in that community, awareness of sexual harassment in other populations escalated.

The academic community began adding its stories to the tsunami of reports with Karen Kelsky's 2017 blog-based, crowd-sourced survey becoming one of the most active venues for reporting. Created on November 30, Kelsky's survey generated 1,567 responses in about ten days (Ellis, para. 3). As of August 2018 (when submissions closed), the blog's spreadsheet included 2438 entries (Kelsky). The *Chronicle of Higher Education*'s 2017 article on revelations of sexual harassment in higher education since the Weinstein expose is equally overwhelming as it provides a running guide of high-profile reports made for over a year (Gluckman, Read, Mangan, & Quilantan, 2017). Anyone paying attention to the news on reported incidences of sexual harassment in academia has seen a cascade of cases making the news since 2017.

From the predatory professor who targets first-year students to the all-too-familiar powerful administrator who fails to address reported incidents, sexual harassment is nearly a commonplace in the academic world. Although action against sexual harassment became possible in the 1960s when Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act established sexual discrimination in employment as illegal, it was not until 1980 that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission pro-

vided guidelines on sexual harassment ("Notice," 1990, Section 4, para. 3). In the intervening years, a Yale student brought one of the first widely publicized cases of sexual harassment to the courts in 1977 (Henry, 1977). Despite the *Alexander vs. Yale University* case being decided in favor of Yale, many scholars have noted that the 1980 case led many universities to institute their first policies on sexual harassment.

Although the Conference on College Composition and Communication issued the "CCCC Standards for Ethical Conduct Regarding Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, and Hostile Environments" in 2016, there remains surprisingly little scholarship that specifically addresses sexual harassment in writing studies' books and journals both prior to and since the "Standards'" publication. Writing studies scholarship has examined all manner of advocacy and activism, with little explicit discussion of sexual harassment.

Those familiar with writing studies research know the field is typically unafraid to tackle sweeping social issues. A quick search of activist scholarship in writing studies finds scholarship on the political economies of composition (Scott, 2009; Welch & Scott, 2016); labor issues (Horning, 2016; Kahn, Lalicker, & Lynch-Biniek, 2017; Penrose, 2012; Schell & Stock, 2001); and racism (Condon & Young, 2013; Inoue, 2015, 2019; Inoue & Poe, 2012; Lamos, 2018; Perryman-Clark, 2016; Poe, Inoue, & Elliot, 2018; Villanueva, 2006). A good deal of activist scholarship also focuses on inclusivity and discrimination by language use (Cushman, 2016; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011), sex, gender, and sexual orientation (Alexander & Rhodes, 2011; Daniel, 2006; Geiger, 2013; Royster, 2000), and ability (Dolmage, 2017; Garrett, 2018; Wood, Dolmage, Price, & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2014) as they pertain to language, writing, and rhetoric. This representative sample of writing studies scholarship indicates a strong commitment to advocacy and illustrates a substantial record of advocating for a broad range of social issues—with the notable exception of sexual harassment.

Before 2017, writing studies scholarship concerning sexual harassment was rare. Some examples include Jeffrey Carroll's (1992) "Freshmen: Confronting Sexual Harassment in the Classroom," Julia Ferganchick-Neufang's (1997) "Harassment On-Line," Tony Filipovitch and Mary McDearmon's (1998) "The Case of the Harassed Teacher" and Margaret Weaver's 2004 "Censoring What Tutors' Clothing Says: First Amendment Rights/Writes within Tutorial Space."

Since 2017, more concern about issues of sexual harassment has begun to appear in English Studies publications. In 2018, Tara Star Johnson and Shea Kerkhoff's editorial in *English Education* examined sexual harassment from a disciplinary perspective and stated their hope that "The field of English education can be part of the paradigm shift, a move to a culture of consent. A culture that moves the onus to stop sexual assault from victims to perpetrators" (p. 14). Also in 2018, *Composition Studies Journal* published six short vignettes on sexual harassment in the *Journal's* "Where we are" section which highlights current and compelling issues. Included in this particular section, "#Metoo and Academia," were a variety

of pieces from graduate students and faculty that highlighted the breadth of the problem and suggested ideas for solving it. Laura R. Micciche, the editor of *Composition Studies*, categorized the pieces as "infuriating and depressing," but noted, "we need them." Micciche's "hope is that the stories included in this issue spark a wider sustained conversation including more voices, led by those who occupy (relative) positions of power, and motivate accountability measures that ensure the safety of students and teachers alike" (p. 11). In addition to accountability, in a 2019 *Composition Forum* article T Passwater elucidated a "safe space pedagogy" imagined as a "building project, not a fixed pedagogy: to build an infrastructure of different pathways for different bodies (para. 57). This kind of writing studies pedagogy disrupts power structures, a disruption necessary to bring about cultural change.

The commitment to activism, social justice, and inclusivity regularly encouraged in writing studies demands a more serious, in-depth looks at sexual harassment. Even though the Conference on College Composition and Communication has an entire web page devoted to "Advocacy and Activism," that page makes no mention of preventing sexual harassment as a necessary form of activism. As a discipline of inclusivity, writing studies must directly address sexual harassment in classrooms, workplaces, and institutions. This book furthers that goal, encouraging research and discussions that will help writing studies professionals to take meaningful action to "dig in" and work to "bake in" the cultural changes needed.