

Perspectives and Discourses on Sexual Harassment in International Higher Education Contexts

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The Project

- Colleagues from universities in nine countries explore prevalence, manifestations and effects of sexual harassment in international higher education contexts and inquire structural implications such as favorable and prohibitive circumstances:
- Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
- Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
- Universidad Nacional de Colombia
- Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales, Ecuador
- Seoul National University, South Korea
- Chung-Ang University, South Korea
- Tokyo University, Japan
- Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India
- Philipps Universität Marburg, Germany
- Freie Universität Berlin, Germany



Facts and Debates I: A global phenomenon

Current Debates

- Higher visibility of the topic in the media after e.g. #niunamenos (not one less; Latin America), #aufschrei (outcry; Germany) and #metoo (US and other) → social debate
- As widespread at universities as in any other societal context, however: different levels of attention for the subjects in higher education subjects → although higher education context with its structural conditions (hierarchies, relations of dependance) is especially suited for the problem
- Normalization and Naturalization



Facts and Debates II: The German Context

Definitions and Discussion

- Definitions vary according to the societal context
- "Sexualized discrimination and violence" is used in university context: (problematic: very broad term)
- Little visibility for the topic in higher education context → mostly addressed in the context of gender equality, hardly any academic debate on the topic

Legal Basis

- General Equal Treatment Act (AGG): workplace regulation
- Legal basis only recently changed → sexual harassment is now a criminal offense
- Problematic framing of the recent change: racist appropriation of the subject after "Cologne events"



Survey Results and Contextualization

Impressions from Freie Universität Berlin

- Survey among students at Freie Universität Berlin in winter semester 2017/18
→ 1156 completed questionnaires
- Executed at departments of biology/chemistry/pharmacy, political and social sciences and at associated central institutes
- Questionnaire from Costa Rica used and "culturally" adapted for FUB context
- Students from all courses of study at the departments were asked to report own experiences and observations concerning sexual harassment
- Access to the courses/teaching staff via deanery and department administration
- Teaching staff reacted very differently – some very supportive, some very restrained → influence on the survey setting
- Some highly emotional reactions

First Findings from the project: similarities

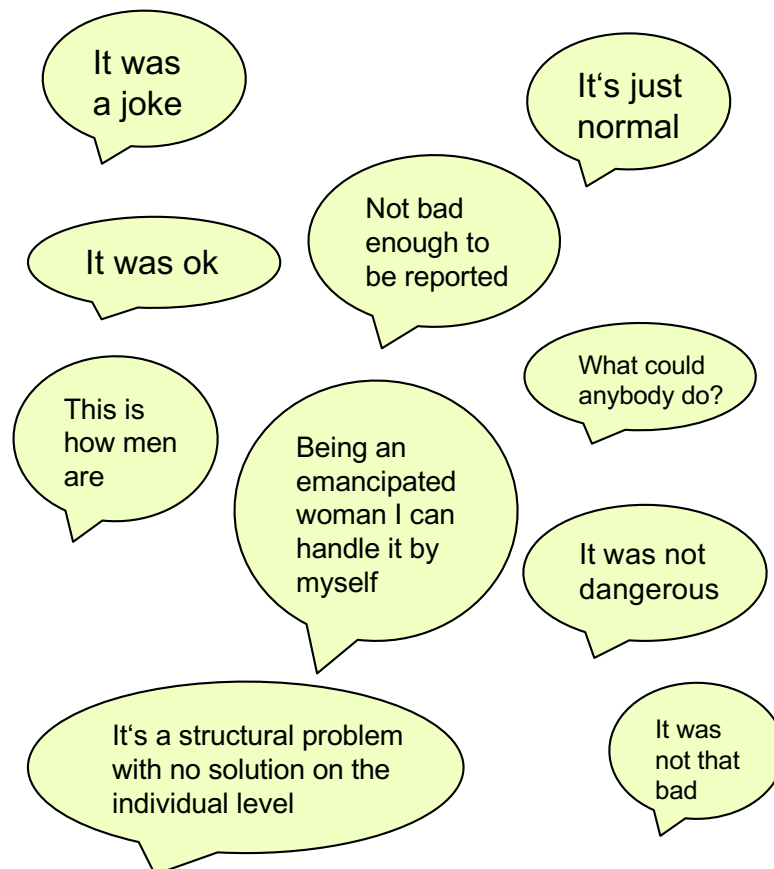
- Overall relatively low complaint rates and even lower conviction rates in terms of formal action taken by the universities
- Widespread verbal harassment at all participating universities → organizational culture at universities does not hinder harassers
- „Climate“ of sexual harassment that is quite normalized („joke, no relevance“), but it shows also that a lot of the persons that have been harassed felt "uncomfortable" („disapproved“, „didn't say anything, but felt deranged“, „didn't say anything, but felt insecure“)
- Verbal harassment mostly from peers, but not at all limited to this group
- Even less or no awareness for harassment of trans* persons
- Universities as „enlightened“ organizations → intellectual work, no more bodily issues
- Problem: what does „at university“ mean? → spatial limitations to university grounds makes no sense, especially in view of increasing online/virtual harassment

First Findings from the project: differences

- „Formal action“ (administrative/legal procedures) differs a lot according to the national contexts
- South Korea: „advanced“ forms of online/virtual harassment
- Not in all countries harassment of trans* persons can be addressed, in others it is more difficult to address harassment of homosexual persons
- University/Campus settings differ a lot and bring along various problems

Open Section Answers (FUB+UMR)

Why no complaint?



Comments on the survey:



Theoretical Framework

- **Extended understanding of violence**
 1. Not only reduced to direct physical and verbal forms of violence => Structural violence (Limitation of the possibility of realization)
 2. structural and personal level of violence are interwoven (Galtung)
 3. Cultural violence: legitimizes personal and structural violence (Galtung) => Normalization (organizational culture)
- **Violence as social relation (of power and domination)**
 - ➔ Vulnerability as embedded in relations of power and domination: economic, reproductive, political and social insecurity is produced and maintained by relations of power and domination (Sauer)
 - ➔ Institutionalized violence: violence = embed in organizations and political, social order
 - ➔ Liberal dualism of public-private = maintains and produces gender relations
- **Gender & violence: instrumentalization by conservative and far right parties & social discourses marked by racialization and individualisation of sexualized violence**
- **Intersectionality**

Challenges & To Dos

1) Research design

- How to address cases of physical violence?
- How to include people's perceptions of themselves and of sexual harassment (also offenders participate in the survey!)?
- How to make the survey more comprehensible and clear?
- Context sensitivity vs. comparability
- How to include and specify on homophobic and trans*/inter*phobic (sexual) harassment and violence in the survey?
- Interviews, focus group interviews, etc.
- In order to understand more about the climate concerning sexual harassment, there should be a survey among other university members (staff, professors ...)

2) Linking research and equality policies

- Raising sensitivity on campus
- Campaigning for more visibility of existing support structures

Thank you for your attention.



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