Sexual harassment: A stubborn fact of anthropologists’ work life?

2016 Membership Survey, Report #5

Introduction
From April 27 – May 25, 2016, members of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) were invited to participate in an online survey regarding their personal demographic information, career trajectories, current professional situation and association membership. Invitations were sent via email to 9,218 current AAA members, of whom 1,988 (21.57%) successfully participated in the survey.

This report focuses on the section of the survey dealing with hostile workplace, sexual harassment and sexual assault issues. The 2016 survey included a set of questions on this topic that were originally written for the 2007 survey of anthropologists outside of higher education conducted by the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology (COSWA) (Brondo et al. 2009). Since this is a sensitive topic, respondents were invited to opt into this section specifically; 1,776 respondents (89.3%) opted in.

Although this report participates in ongoing conversations regarding hostile workplaces and sexual harassment within the profession of anthropology (Clancy et al. 2014) and in higher education more broadly (Hill and Silva 2005), as well as the role of anthropologists in confronting gender-based violence (Wies and Haldane 2011), direct comparisons between reports are difficult because of differences in research methodology. Interested readers are encouraged to consult these sources for broader context.

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Key Findings

- Women are significantly more likely than men to have experienced a hostile workplace and most types of unwanted sexual behaviors.
- Unwanted behavior tends to go unreported, especially among the more frequent behaviors.
- There is no effect of respondents’ student status or employment sector on the likelihood of having experienced a hostile workplace and unwanted sexual behaviors.

1 Later renamed Committee on Gender Equity in Anthropology (CoGEA); subsequently incorporated into Members’ Programmatic, Advisory and Advocacy Committee (MPAAC).
Overall frequency

The survey form listed eight specific unwelcome behaviors and asked respondents whether they had experienced these behaviors in their “current institutional context.” For each behavior, respondents could indicate never, once, or more than once. Overall frequency of responses is shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Overall frequency](image)

Correlations

Responses were compared between men and women respondents, using Kendall’s tau to test for significant differences. (Respondents who did not indicate a binary gender category are not included here, to protect the privacy of the small number of respondents.) Results are shown below, grouping these behaviors into frequent (more than 15% of respondents; Figure 2), moderate (4–9%; Figure 3) and infrequent (less than 2%; Figure 4). In general, among more frequent behaviors, women are more likely to have experienced them, while less frequent behaviors tended not to show significant differences, although this may be a statistical artifact at the extreme end of the range.
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Figure 2: Frequent behaviors, men vs. women (**p < 0.001)

Figure 3: Moderately frequent behaviors, men vs. women (**p < 0.001)

Figure 4: Rare behaviors, men vs. women (# Marginally significant, p = 0.057)
To investigate potential correlations other than gender, an ordinal regression was conducted on each item, including gender, age, race, student status and employment sector as independent variables. There was no significant effect of student status or employment sector. While age and gender are strongly correlated in this data set (Ginsberg 2016), we do see some correlations with age even when we control for gender, in the case of sexual looks, gestures ($R=0.056, p=0.045$) and stalking ($R=0.066, p=0.017$). Race was a significant predictor of these two items as well ($p < 0.001$), as illustrated in Figure 5 and Figure 6, but was not significant elsewhere. (To protect the privacy of the small number of respondents, Native American and Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander respondents are not included.)

![Figure 5: "Sexual looks, gestures" vs. race](image)

![Figure 6: "Stalking" vs. race](image)

**Reporting**

For each of the behaviors named in the preceding sections, respondents were also asked, *If you personally experienced this type of behavior, was it reported?* The responses, illustrated in Figure 7, indicate that these types of unwanted behavior tend to go unreported, especially among more frequent behaviors.
Differences between men and women respondents were also investigated regarding these questions. Figure 8 shows the frequency with which these unwanted behaviors were reported, calculated as a percentage of those respondents of each gender who had experienced that behavior; keep in mind that the less frequent behaviors on this chart represent larger percentages of much smaller total numbers. The analysis shows small but significant differences regarding more frequent behaviors, with women in most cases less likely than men to report these behaviors.
The final question of this section was *How effectively do you feel that your institution handles claims of sexual harassment in accordance with federal law?* Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale, with women respondents less likely to give a positive response (Kendall’s τ = 0.079, \( p < 0.001 \)). 41% of men and 45% of women responded “I don’t know / Not applicable,” and the remaining responses are illustrated in Figure 9.

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**Figure 8: Reporting of unwanted behaviors, per gender (\(*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01\)**)**

**Figure 9: Assessment of institution, by gender**
Stronger than the effect of gender, however, was the correlation between responses to this question and respondents’ having experienced unwanted sexual behavior ($\tau = 0.094, p < 0.001$). A total of 433 respondents checked “Once” or “More than once” in response to at least one of the initial eight questions about experiences of unwanted behaviors, compared to 868 who checked “Never” for all of them. 23.7% of this first group, compared to 50% of the second, checked “I don’t know / Not applicable” when asked to assess their institution, and the remaining responses are illustrated in Figure 10.

![Figure 10: Assessment of institution, by experience of unwanted behaviors](image)

This analysis was also performed regarding a respondent’s having reported unwanted behaviors, but their having experienced unwanted behaviors was a stronger predictor of their assessment of the institution.

**Applications and future research**

AAA remains committed to a policy of zero tolerance for sexual harassment. It is illegal, and also constitutes a violation of the “respectful and ethical professional relationships” provision of our statement of professional responsibilities (American Anthropological Association 2012). Actions that contribute to a hostile workplace and unwanted sexual behaviors have no place in the profession of anthropology, and we will continue to monitor and report on the prevalence of these circumstances, in the hope that members of the profession will be able to use these findings to advocate for improvements in their own educational and workplace environments. We will continue to include these items on future member surveys to monitor more consistently over time the incidence of these experiences, and we plan to expand the scope of inquiry beyond respondents’ current work environment to include field sites and professional meetings as well. By monitoring these issues, we will be able to assess the impact of interventions that are staged to reduce the incidence of hostile workplace and unwanted sexual behavior.
References


