
The Perception and Construction of Sexual Harassment by Czech University Students*

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Abstract: The individual perception of sexual harassment and the gap between the individual and legal-institutional definitions of sexual harassment has been subject to intense scientific scrutiny as this is considered to be one of the reasons for the failure of anti-harassment policies. This article focuses on perceptions and constructions of sexual harassment by students and the gap between students' individual definitions and expert (mainly legislative) definitions of sexual harassment. The article centres on two main research questions: (1) how do students perceive sexual harassment (whether they construct sexual harassment as something they might encounter in everyday university life) and (2) what are the factors and dimensions that contribute to particular behaviour being labelled as sexual harassment? The study is based primarily on qualitative in-depth interviews with students, which are complemented by quantitative questionnaire data from a survey conducted between 2008 and 2009 at a Prague university. The analysis shows that even if sexual harassment by professors is not an uncommon phenomenon among students, it is constructed as a remote problem which students perceive as something that does not relate to them. Although students do not label their experience of sexist and sexualised behaviour as sexual harassment, the analysis reveals certain factors which result in the labelling of certain behaviour as sexual harassment. The most significant among these factors were the explicit nature of sexual harassment, power imbalance, situational context and the violation of individual boundaries.

Keywords: sexual harassment, higher education, anti-harassment policy, Czech Republic

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Sexual harassment in higher education is an objectionable form of conduct which has negative effects on individuals and their mental well-being and self-confidence and which can adversely affect the study and professional paths of young people [Huerta et al. 2006; Knapp et al. 1997]. The severity of the impact of sexual harassment in higher education is amplified by the fact that formal education is often a key factor in an individual's professional and personal development, and this is even truer for women, who face more difficult conditions for career advancement in the labour market than men [see, e.g., Crompton and Harris 1998; on the Czech Republic, see Křížková and Vohlídalová 2009; Čermáková 1997].

While we could probably find wide support, even in the relatively gender conservative Czech society, for the claim that sexual harassment is something inappropriate and unwelcome, a similar consensus on what sexual harassment is and what concrete forms it takes is absent. Sexual harassment is not a social fact in the Durkheimian sense of the word, something that exists independently of us as an objective reality. Like our whole social world, sexual harassment is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon [Berger and Luckmann 1999; Charmaz 2003; Gergen 1999]. Nonetheless, social constructions and definitions have a real impact on people's everyday lives because they shape our worlds and our everyday realities [Potter 1996: 98; Gergen 1999: 64]. As in Thomas's theorem, '[i]f men define things as real, they are real in their consequences' [Thomas 1923 cit. in Merton 2000: 196]. Only if people define a situation as problematic can we expect that they will seek a remedy [Bacchi 2000; Blumer 1971; Schneider 1985].

In this article I concentrate on the perceptions and constructions of sexual harassment by students and focus on the gap between students' individual definitions and expert (mainly legislative) definitions of sexual harassment. I ask the following questions: (1) How do students construct sexual harassment and do they consider it an issue that relates to them? (2) What factors and dimensions contribute to particular forms of behaviour being labelled as sexual harassment while others are not?

In my analysis I draw primarily on qualitative interviews with students, and these are accompanied by quantitative data from a questionnaire survey (all the data used were obtained between 2008 and 2009 as part of work on the Barriers project¹). Although sexual harassment can take many forms, this analysis concentrates on the harassment of students by teachers, which, given to the imbalance of power and students' limited possibilities to defend themselves, represents one of the most serious forms of harassment.

Although sexual harassment in higher education has—despite its specificity—a number of commonalities with sexual harassment in labour law relations,

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I consider the focus on higher education important for two reasons. First, the issue of sexual harassment in higher education is relatively new and unexplored in the Czech Republic. Second, universities play a major role in the process of establishing new social norms and reproducing old ones. They educate and socialise future professional and intellectual elites; they instil in people norms and rules of behaviour. The position they occupy in society makes them one of the key places where stereotypes are reproduced or, conversely, where stereotypical attitudes are changed. If teachers act inappropriately towards students, make sexist jokes, and attack women's or men's intellectual capabilities, they illustrate that such behaviour is normal. Such behaviour thus becomes routine, normalised, and can be further reproduced by students [Herbert 1997: 26]. The study of sexual harassment in education can thus illuminate and explain many general aspects of sexual harassment in the Czech cultural context.

This article is structured into four parts. The first, which is the point of reference for my analysis, explores in detail the gap between individual and expert definitions of sexual harassment, the factors that contribute to the labelling of sexual harassment, and how sexual harassment is defined by experts. The second part concentrates on methodological issues and the epistemological background I draw on. The third part presents the results of the qualitative analysis and in the concluding section I present my findings and their implications.

Individual and expert definitions of sexual harassment

The gap between expert and individual definitions and the factors that contribute to the labelling of sexual harassment

Although 'law is a powerful structuring mechanism for what is defined as sexual harassment' [Welsh et al. 2006: 103], and although with the help of official definitions of sexual harassment and anti-harassment policies many people have come to label behaviour that they previously considered to be normal as unwanted and intolerable [Williams, Lam and Shively 1992; Anderson 2006], people have not come to identify fully with the definitions of sexual harassment that the related policies and legislation have introduced. It is clear that expert definitions of sexual harassment (such as those contained in research, university policies, and national legislation) do not overlap with how people label their experience; people do not call behaviour that they experience as unwanted, unpleasant, or sexist 'sexual harassment'.

The gap between individual notions and expert definitions of harassment and the reluctance to label certain forms of behaviour as sexual harassment are considered to be some of the main reasons for the failure of anti-harassment policies and to an ongoing general reluctance to take official action against sexual harassment [e.g. Bursik 1992; Williams, Lam and Shively 1992; Powell 1986]. Many studies have been carried out to explore the gap between the incidence of sexual

harassment and the percentage of people who label their experience as sexual harassment in order to examine the process of labelling sexual harassment and to analyse the factors that contribute to a particular behaviour being labelled as such [for research on students' perceptions, see, e.g., Hill and Silva 2005; Larsson, Hensing and Allebeck 2003; Dziech and Weiner 1984; Herbert 1997].

Some experts believe that a lack of awareness and information about the problem are the reasons why people do not label as sexual harassment forms of behaviour that are defined as sexual harassment in legislation and anti-harassment policies. Carrie Herbert [1997] identifies the problem in people's uncertainty as to the definition of sexual harassment, general ignorance of the issue, and a lack of information. Patti Giuffre and Christine Williams [1994] reached similar conclusions, claiming that one reason sexual harassment is not labelled as such is that people are not aware that such behaviour is even illegal [Giuffre and Williams 1994: 379]. According to Williams, Lam and Shively [1992] and Anderson [2006], the gender culture of an environment (a school, the workplace) and the willingness of a given organisation to redress the problem also play a role.

Other authors, such as Paula Nicolson [1997] and Kathleen Cairns [1997], emphasise the gender order of society and organisations, patriarchal relations, power inequalities, and gender socialisation. Paula Nicolson [1997], who studied sexual harassment and its labelling at a medical faculty, concludes her study with a claim that the medical faculty is a 'toxic' organisation (i.e. an organisation very hostile to women) that socialises women to simply ignore such behaviour. She argues that '. . . medical school . . . reinforces negative gender stereotypes and poor self image [of women]' [ibid.: 37].

According to Kathleen Cairns [1997], women have learnt to accept masculine norms and notions of femininity and of how a woman should behave, and of how she should react to men's comments, invitations for coffee, or unwanted compliments. Under the influence of masculine norms and masculine realities they have learnt not to attribute significance to their own perceptions of situations and have a tendency to not consider their experience and experiences as 'real'. They may also fear that they will not be believed [Jensen and Gutek 1982].

Research nevertheless also shows that, despite this, women are more sensitive to sexual harassment, are more inclined to label even implicit forms of such behaviour as harassment, and their definitions are usually wider than men's [e.g. Reilly et al. 1982; Bursik 1992; Cleveland and Kerst 1993: 62; Powell 1986; Fitzgerald and Ormerod 1991: 282]. These gender differences are generally attributed to differences in women's and men's experiences, specifically to the fact that women encounter this type of behaviour more often than men [Dziech and Weiner 1984: 80; Paludi 1996: 5; Kalof et al. 2001]. Giuffre and Williams [1994] caution that experiences differ even in cases where both women and men participate in a sexualised work culture, since women tend to be more exposed to its negative impact

[*ibid.*: 398] and more frequently become victims of sexual harassment motivated by power [Williams, Lam and Shively 1992: 52]. According to some scholars [e.g. Cleveland and Kerst 1993: 62; Thomas 1997], men lack the cognitive schema for the perception and description of sexual harassment, which can also be related to their lower perceptiveness towards the issue.

The imbalance of power in the relationship between the actors involved is another major factor that affects assessments and definitions of sexual harassment. If harassment is initiated by a person in a higher position against a person in a lower position, such behaviour is more often considered to be harassment than are the 'peer-to-peer' form (harassment between peers or people in the same position) or the 'contrapower' form (harassment initiated by a person in a lower position against a person in a higher position) [Bursik 1992: 408; Cleveland and Kerst 1993; Giuffre and Williams 1994; Fitzgerald and Ormerod 1991; Dougherty et al. 1996]. A factor related to such power imbalances that influences the perception of particular behaviour as harassment is the presence of violence, force, and involuntariness [Reilly et al. 1982].

The context of the relationship between the harassed and the harasser, their closeness, and the nature of their previous contact also impact assessments of sexual harassment. If before the incident the actors involved had a close relationship, there is less of a probability that such behaviour will be viewed as sexual harassment [Reilly et al. 1982; Weber-Burdin and Rossi 1982; Cohen and Gutek 1985]. Weber-Burdin and Rossi [1982: 111] compare this fact to perceptions of rape, where the nature of previous social interaction between the actors has a major influence on how the situation is perceived.

Another important and frequently discussed factor is the nature of harassment. The role of the intention is often mentioned together with the degree to which sexual harassment is explicit [Cohen and Gutek 1985]. The main dividing line between conduct that is and is not perceived as sexual harassment lies in whether physical forms of harassment and blackmail are involved or whether the behaviour involves verbal and less explicit forms of harassment [Cohen and Gutek 1985; Dougherty et al. 1996; Fitzgerald and Ormerod 1991; Hill and Silva 2005; Kelley and Parsons 2000; Schneider 1987; Dziech and Weiner 1984; Kalof et al. 2001].

The specific social and cultural context also plays an important role. In their research, Welsh et al. [2006] noted how perceptions and definitions of sexual harassment differed between migrants and women from ethnic minorities on one hand and white middle-class women on the other. They argue that, unlike migrants and minority women, for whom the definition was narrowly linked to discrimination based on their ethnic origin or race, white middle-class women's notions more or less corresponded to the valid legislative definitions [Welsh et al. 2006: 88].

Expert definitions of sexual harassment

Although expert definitions of sexual harassment (under which I include legislation, universities policies, and research definitions) are also a social construct, just like individual definitions of sexual harassment, it is clear that over the past thirty years, expert definitions of sexual harassment have largely become fixed in Western countries.

Expert definitions of sexual harassment, including legislative and research definitions, usually agree that sexual harassment can take many forms, from verbal attacks to more serious forms such as blackmail and physical assault [Fitzgerald et al. 1988; Gruber 1992]. Although a unified definition of sexual harassment does not exist, expert definitions have many features in common: sexual harassment is usually defined as unwanted, inappropriate, and offensive behaviour, which usually involves the abuse of unequal power derived from the institutional or gender structure [Dziech and Weiner 1984; Huerta et al. 2006; MacKinnon 1979; Thomas 1997: 148].

The constructed nature of expert definitions of sexual harassment is explained by the constructivist approach to social issues [Blumer 1971; Schneider 1985] and policy creation [Bacchi 2000]. These theories analyse how definitions of a certain phenomenon influence the ways in which the phenomenon is treated. In this approach, a social issue is something that does not exist objectively and independently but as something that is created, legitimated, and institutionalised as a social issue. Because the issue is socially defined, power relations and political interests play a role in its definition [Coltrane and Adams 2003]. This explains why certain phenomena are labelled as a social issue, but also why many clearly serious social problems are not given social attention [Blumer 1971; Bacchi 2000]. The constructivist approach to social issues shows how tangible and real the impact of some social constructions can be on our everyday lives [Bacchi 2000: 55]. The resulting definition of a social issue importantly shapes the way in which a given behaviour is treated [Blumer 1971; Bacchi 2000; Schneider 1985], as is amply manifested in the case of the emergence of sexual harassment as a social problem in the 1970s.

Sexual harassment was labelled as a social problem at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s by the American lawyer and feminist Catherine MacKinnon [1979]. MacKinnon was the author of the first and probably the most important definition of sexual harassment in 1979; she was also the author of the first legislative bill addressing sexual harassment in labour law. Under sexual harassment she included verbal and physical forms of harassment [MacKinnon 1979: 29] and distinguished 'quid pro quo harassment' [ibid.: 33], involving sexual coercion and blackmail, from 'hostile environment harassment', which covers a range of softer forms of behaviour, such as sexual innuendo and other types of verbal harassment [ibid.: 40]. She explained sexual harassment as a manifestation of women's oppression by men and identified it as one form of sex-based discrimination. MacKinnon argued that sexual harassment is a tool through which men enforce

their dominance over women, keep them in a subordinate position, lower their work status, and push them out of positions in which they could compete with men [ibid.: 215].

Sexual harassment of course existed before this legal definition was introduced, but it was not labelled as a social problem and remained invisible; there was no awareness of or tools to deal with it. The recognition of sexual harassment as a social issue was thus one of the major achievements of second wave feminism and resulted in its official definition and a clear political response in the form of anti-discrimination legislation.

With increasing recognition of sexual harassment as unacceptable behaviour in education and in the labour market, the definition of sexual harassment was variously modified in later legislation. In particular, there was a shift from the notion of sexual harassment as a form of discrimination to a notion of sexual harassment as the violation of human dignity [Zippel 2006: 102; Anderson 2006]. In addition, sexual harassment came under attack, especially as antifeminist sentiments² surfaced in the United States in the 1990s [Thomas and Kitzinger 1997: 90]. 'Dignity violation' approaches treat sexual harassment as a phenomenon which harms an individual, and not as a form of discrimination. K. S. Zippel [2006] and E. Anderson [2006] argue that this trend marks a shift away from the original feminist anchor of sexual harassment because it abandons the notion that sexual harassment is gendered and that power is involved. Consequently, a structural issue becomes an individual problem and thus explanations based on structural (gender) inequalities cannot be applied.

At the level of the EU, harassment and sexual harassment are defined (1) with a reference to the harasser's intention, (2) by the fact that such behaviour constitutes a violation of a person's dignity, and (3) by the explicit inclusion of physical forms and forms of hostile environment. National legislative frameworks governing sexual harassment in individual EU member states are also oriented in this way.³ Despite various deviations the national definitions usually include verbal and physical forms of harassment, quid pro quo harassment, and hostile environment [Report. . . 2004: 32]. The Czech Republic is no exception here, although it was not until recently that sexual harassment was integrated into the legislative system.⁴ The only legally binding definition of sexual harassment in

² Thomas and Kitzinger [1997] conclude that in this period there was a clear effort to eliminate sexual harassment from the public space and give it again an individual dimension and treat it as a 'private' problem.

³ Directive 2002/73/EC bound all EU member states to include sexual harassment in their national legislation by 2005.

⁴ Legislative treatment of sexual harassment was a long time coming in the Czech legal system and in its current form was instituted only recently. A definition of sexual harassment was not introduced into the Czech legal until as late as 2000 in response to the need to harmonise Czech law with EU law (Article 7, Paragraph 2 of Act No. 155/2000 Coll.). It was not until 2004 that sexual harassment was defined as discrimination (Act No. 46/2004 Coll.). In the 2006 Labour Code (Act No. 262/2006 Coll., Article 16, Paragraph 2) this sec-

the Czech Republic today can be found in the Antidiscrimination Act (Act No. 198/2009 Coll.), and addresses discrimination in a range of areas which—in addition to labour issues and access to health care—explicitly include access to and the provision of education (Act No. 198/2009 Coll., Section 1).⁵

In addition to legal regulations, a wide definition of sexual harassment is also used in university policies, which are often based on national legislation (e.g. Vienna University, and in the UK University College London and the London School of Economics) and on research definitions of sexual harassment [e.g. Gruber 1992; Hill and Silva 2005; Fitzgerald 1996].

In my analysis, I draw on the aforementioned expert definitions of sexual harassment, which, although they are a construction, present relatively stable definitions of sexual harassment (i.e. they have been legalised and institution-alised in the Czech Republic, the EU, and a number of developed countries, and are repeatedly used in social research into sexual harassment). They build on the assumption that sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour which negatively impacts people's well-being and human dignity. According to these definitions, sexual harassment does not include only obvious and explicit forms of sexual harassment but also a range of other, softer forms of unwanted conduct. I investigate to what extent these expert definitions are mirrored in students' individual definitions, and explore the gap between the expert and individual definitions of sexual harassment in the Czech context. I ask how students define sexual harassment and, in line with other research studies on the role of various factors in the labelling of sexual harassment, what factors are related to one behaviour being labelled as sexual harassment and another not.

Most of the research studies conducted so far come from the Anglo-American cultural context, while this analysis offers a view of the specific Czech cultural environment, where the issue of sexual harassment in education surfaced only recently, the tradition of legally addressing sexual harassment is quite short, anti-

tion was deleted and was replaced with a reference to the Antidiscrimination Act, which was not, however, adopted until 2009. Thus, for three years, the Czech Republic did not have any provision to redress (not only) the issue of sexual harassment.

⁵ As in the European directive, Czech legislation distinguishes between harassment and sexual harassment and both forms are defined very widely with a reference to the intention of the perpetrator, the violation of human dignity, and the inclusion of quid pro quo and hostile environment forms:

(1) Harassment is understood as unwelcome behaviour

(a) the intention or consequence of which is denigration of human dignity of an individual and the creation of a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment or

(b) which can be justifiably perceived as a condition for a decision that can influence the exercise of rights and duties following from labour law relations.

(2) sexual harassment is understood as behaviour pursuant to Paragraph 1 which is sexual in nature.

harassment policies are not common in higher education institutions, and overall gender sensitivity is quite low [Weiner 2010; Křížková, Penner and Peterson 2010; Havelková 1993; Šiklová 1997]. Before I present the research results, I will briefly introduce the research methodology and the epistemological background I use.

Methodology

Epistemological background

As the introductory section suggests, in this text I use the constructivist approach, according to which people do not find their knowledge in the 'objective' world but construe it themselves. Our knowledge is always situated; it is influenced by ideologies, values, experiences, and material resources [Schwandt 2003: 198; Law 2004]. Constructivist research aims to understand how research participants construct their everyday realities and how they give meanings to their actions [Charmaz 2003; Gubrium and Holstein 2003]. This process does not occur in isolation; it is a social phenomenon. Constructing realities occurs in relation to other people through communication, language, shared understandings, and power relations [Schwandt 2003; Potter 1996; Gergen 1999; Berger and Luckmann 1999]. Analyses of individual constructions, interpretations, and definitions can thus reveal solid structures such as commonly shared social norms, values, and power relations.

The constructivist approach developed in science and technology studies emphasises the dialectical relationship between social reality and its construction. In this approach [Law and Urry 2005], each construction of a reality and definition of reality creates, or enacts, this reality. The space for enactment is always defined by power and not all enactments of reality have equal weight and equal impact; not all interpretations and enactments of reality have the same ability to change and affect reality [Schwandt 2003]. The fact that reality is constructed does not mean that it is not real, that it is not perceived as real by the actors involved [Law and Urry 2005]. Reality is produced and stabilised through a complex process of social relations and it is much easier to produce some realities than others [ibid.].

Because realities are enacted, it is necessary, when analysing definitions of sexual harassment by students, to take into account that students are located in a markedly disadvantaged position compared to the potential harassers among teachers. Students' realities are created in certain firmly defined boundaries, in a certain power and social context. The students are clearly not those who define the rules of the game. As Linda Eyre showed [2000] in her analysis of discursive practices related to sexual harassment in a university environment, sexual harassment was legitimated through discourses about academic freedoms and the antifeminist backlash rhetoric used especially by academic workers and judges, while the voices of women students and feminist organisations were systematically silenced.

Research design

I studied sexual harassment at one faculty of a Prague university using a mixed research design with qualitative and quantitative components. The quantitative component consisted of a questionnaire survey mapping students' experiences with and attitudes towards sexual harassment. The quantitative survey was followed by in-depth interviews with students at the faculty. The advantage to combining these research methods is that doing so offers different perspectives which complement one another. This provides a clear advantage when dealing with an understudied research problem (which sexual harassment in Czech higher education clearly is). The questionnaire survey made it possible (1) to quantify the prevalence of sexual harassment at the given university, (2) to quantify gender differences in the experience of individual forms of harassment and in the perception of sexual harassment, (3) to quantify the gap between the experience of certain forms of behaviour which are usually labelled as sexual harassment, and (4) to examine how people perceive this experience. The qualitative research made it possible to carry out a more nuanced analysis of how students construct sexual harassment, how they live their experience of harassment, what aspects they associate with harassment, and how they interpret various forms of harassment.

The questionnaire survey focused on students' experiences with and attitudes towards sexual harassment and was carried out in late 2008 and early 2009. It involved 700 students in the MA and BA programmes, of whom 464 were women and 236 men. Upon agreement with teachers, data collection occurred during classes, where trained coordinators distributed and collected the questionnaire and provided instructions on how to complete it. When selecting the classes for questionnaire distribution, we strove to ensure that the variety of disciplines and subjects offered at the faculty was represented. We controlled the sample for sex and degree-level of study (whether the students were enrolled in a BA or MA programme). Although our research sample corresponds approximately with the composition of the students at the faculty in terms of these variables, it has certain limits. First, the sample had to be limited to the students who were present at the school at the time of the survey (thus, those who do not attend lectures or were not at the particular lecture in which the survey was carried out are not included: for example, distance learning students, students who were sick, or students who were working). Second, we depended on whether a given teacher was willing to let us enter his or her class. Although we used a mediator who facilitated our negotiations with individual teachers, it was not exceptional for the teachers to refuse our request.

A total of 18 semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with students at the selected faculty. These concentrated on students' experiences with individual forms of harassment and their attitudes towards this behaviour. In our research sample there were 13 women and 5 men, of whom 8 were enrolled in a doctoral programme, 7 in an MA programme, and 3 in a BA programme. We re-

cruited the qualitative study participants variously—by e-mail, advertisements at the school, and through snowball sampling. Although a certain degree of self-selection can be discerned, which is an integral part of all (not only) qualitative research, such self-selection does not necessarily reduce the quality of the analyses because the goal of the qualitative research was not to provide a representative overview but to explain how students construct sexual harassment and how they experience it. When studying how people experience sexual harassment, how they define and construct it, people who have personal experience can provide rich narratives and material for analysis.

We carried out semi-structured interviews that followed a certain script⁶ while providing enough space for research participants' free narratives. We used the approach of the comprehensive interview [Kaufmann 2006], according to which the opinions and attitudes of people are organised in several layers, from 'surface' proclamations to deeper opinions and ideas. The goal of the researcher is to reach beyond the surface statement and uncover deeper layers of ideas and opinions. The researcher therefore strives to deepen the participants' narratives, goes back to what has been said or suggested or even clears up contradictions in statements so that research participants can further develop their ideas and opinions [Kaufman 2006].

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed. In the qualitative data analysis I drew on elements of grounded theory [Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Charmaz 2006]. My approach to creating generalisations and hypotheses was inductive, based on multilevel coding; the goal was to create codes, categories (more abstract classes of internally similar terms), and their features and to identify mutual relations and dependencies among these codes, categories, and features [Strauss and Corbin 1998].

Research definitions of sexual harassment and the questionnaire

Our research definitions of sexual harassment and the construction of the questionnaire⁷ drew on the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) [Fitzgerald et al. 1988; Fitzgerald 1993], which is a 'translation' of the quid pro quo and hostile environment dichotomy [MacKinnon 1979] into the language of empirical research.

⁶ The script contained several thematic units and the exact wording of each question was adapted to the interview. The thematic blocks were: (1) questions regarding the faculty, relations between students and teachers; (2) the participants' definition of the term sexual harassment, here we were interested in what comes to students' mind when sexual harassment was brought up, how they define it; (3) a section dedicated to experience with various forms of harassment and attitudes towards sexual harassment; (4) a section dedicated to the issue of how sexual harassment is addressed at the given school (what students think, what forms of help they would like to get, where they see problems, etc.).

⁷ Special emphasis was placed on sensitively translating and formulating the questions. Unlike the original SEQ, which focused exclusively on respondents' experiences with indi-

Although this operationalisation has its critics [e.g. Gutek, Murphy and Douma 2004] and we can find alternative operationalisations [see, e.g., Gruber 1992], it is used frequently [e.g. Cortina 2001; Wasti et al. 2000].⁸ The major advantage is that it captures sexual and gender harassment in a wide range of manifestations from the softest forms to the most serious ones.

Building on Frank Till's classification [1980], Luisa Fitzgerald [1993] distinguished three types of sexual harassment: gender harassment (involving softer forms of harassment, such as offences, comments, inappropriate gestures, use of lewd teaching materials), unwelcome sexual attention (efforts to establish an intimate relationship, talk about sexual or intimate topics, invitation on a date, etc.), and sexual coercion (a forced sexual encounter for reward or under threat, unwelcome physical touching and physical assault).

In our questionnaire, individual forms of harassment were represented as follows: As regards gender harassment, we asked about students' experiences with demeaning remarks about men and women, sexual stories, lewd teaching materials, sex-based (dis)advantages, and leering. As regards unwelcome sexual attention, we included questions about experiences with comments on looks and behaviour, efforts to establish an intimate relationship, talk about sexual or intimate topics, and invitations on a date. As regards the most serious form of sexual harassment, sexual coercion, we inquired into students' experiences with offers of sexual intimacy in exchange for a reward or under threat and their experiences with potential intimate encounters, touching or other types of behaviour that violate a student's personal space, and physical attacks.

Results of the analysis

The qualitative study and the quantitative survey show that sexual harassment is no rare occurrence at the studied faculty. According to the quantitative study, 67% of students in MA and BA programmes had encountered some form of sexual harassment during their studies,⁹ while 22% of students had encountered more serious forms, whether unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion, and over 65% of students had experienced gender harassment [Vohlídalová 2009]. A study by Smetáčková and Pavlík [2011] discovered an even higher incidence of sexual harassment—78% [ibid.: 377]. Findings from the qualitative study also pointed

vidual forms of harassing behaviour, our questionnaire was expanded to include a section mapping students' attitudes towards sexual harassment and ideas about the possibilities for resolving the issue of sexual harassment at their particular school.

⁸ In view of its widespread use it allows us (though in a limited way) to set our research findings in a wider international context.

⁹ This means that a total of 67% of students encountered at least one concrete form of behaviour that could be classified as gender harassment, unwelcome sexual attention, or sexual coercion. We asked the students whether they encountered each particular form of behaviour during their study at the given university.

to students' frequent experience with various forms of sexual harassment at the faculty. In students' statements we can find a wide range of various forms of harassment, from sexist jokes and comments insulting women, to repeated invitations to private work-unrelated dates outside school and attempts to establish a relationship, to conversations about intimate topics and the harshest forms of harassment such as sexual assault, touching, and blackmail.

In agreement with foreign studies, however, the students rarely discussed their experience in terms of sexual harassment. In the questionnaire survey only 13 women (2.8%) and 6 men (2.5%) responded positively to a direct question whether they had ever encountered sexual harassment by a teacher or another employee at the faculty. Similar results were reached by Smetáčková and Pavlík [2011: 378], in whose study only 3% of respondents viewed their experience as sexual harassment.

The gap between how often Czech students encounter harassment and the way they perceive and label their experience is bigger than what has been observed in studies abroad. While in foreign studies about 5–10% of students respond positively to the question whether they had encountered sexual harassment [e.g. Fitzgerald et al. 1988: 172; Hill and Silva 2005; Kalof et al. 2001], in our study it was only 2.7% of all students and a mere 4% (3.8% of men, 4.1% of women) of those who had experienced some form of harassment. We can see a similar trend in the qualitative interviews, where students only rarely labelled their experience as sexual harassment, although certain behaviour was described as unpleasant, unwanted, or degrading to them.

Although sexual harassment was only rarely called sexual harassment, there are characteristics that are tied to whether a given behaviour is labelled as sexual harassment. Among the main factors are the degree to which harassment is explicit, the existence of a power imbalance, the context of the interaction (intention and a previous relationship between the actors), and type of personality. Before we concentrate on each of these aspects, let us pause over one aspect that plays a key role in how sexual harassment is labelled and has implications for the introduction of policies to combat sexual harassment: the construction of sexual harassment as something serious but unreal and abstract.

Sexual harassment? That doesn't relate to me!

Sexual harassment is described by students as behaviour that is unwanted, unwelcome, and otherwise unpleasant or degrading ('someone's behaviour that the harassed person doesn't want' 'sexual harassment is harassment of a person who clearly states that the other person's behaviour is unpleasant'¹⁰) and as something that has no place in higher education. The relative seriousness which students

¹⁰ Questionnaire responses to an open-ended question about students' own definitions of sexual harassment.

attribute to sexual harassment underlines the fact that many of them (over 55% of male students and 74% of female students) would appreciate it if rules were introduced to address cases of sexual harassment at their school.¹¹

Despite the gravity attributed to sexual harassment by students, it is constructed as an abstract phenomenon which does not concern them immediately. The remoteness of the issue is constructed in two basic ways in the interviews: (1) sexual harassment is linked to extreme forms of behaviour whereas the non-extreme forms are constructed as normal and natural and therefore outside the category of sexual harassment; (2) sexual harassment is understood as 'a problem experienced by others' against whom the students define themselves.

Sexual harassment as an extreme experience, sexist and sexualised forms of behaviour as a normal affair

Sexual harassment is perceived as something extreme, something that goes significantly beyond the boundary of decent behaviour, normality, and standard communication among people, as is shown by Petr, who sees sexual harassment as 'completely inappropriate chasing': 'It includes, I guess, the harshest forms. For example, if someone started to chase you totally inappropriately in some way or something like that or the touching. . . .' (Petr, male, PhD student) Or Gita who in connection with sexual harassment talks about 'extremes', which she intensifies with the attribute 'terrible': 'Well, personally, I think that it will of course involve some terrible extremes when you simply, although you have said four hundred times no, and although you're trying to address the issue, it has no effect.' (Gita, female, PhD student)

Constructing sexual harassment as something extreme is probably related to the reluctance on the part of the students to use the term sexual harassment at all, as Dana stated: 'Well, just to say that someone has sexually harassed me, a person has to really feel that it is really something harsh. It's so unlike when I say: "He met me in the corridor, touched my shoulder and it bothers me terribly".' (Dana, female, MA student)

Constructing sexual harassment as behaviour that crosses the boundaries of normality, as something abnormal, inappropriate, and improper, also often appeared in the questionnaire survey. In responses to an open-ended question about how they would define sexual harassment the students mentioned 'improper comments which aren't funny', 'improper touching, verbal comments of a sexual nature', 'excessive harassment of another person based on sexual motives'. These collocations and expressions emphasise that objective standards are violated.

¹¹ Opinions about the implementation of such measures are, however, often linked to fears of their abuse, which is perceived as easy and unproblematic.

The construction of sexual harassment as an extreme is strengthened by how students define forms of behaviour that in their view do not constitute sexual harassment as something common that we all encounter on a daily basis both in and outside school. Various forms of harassment (most often the softer forms, such as sexist comments and jokes, invitations on a date or flirting, some students also mentioned a slap on the bottom or unwanted physical contact) were described as something 'normal' or 'common', as a norm, not an extreme. According to students' statements flirting between students and teachers is something that occurs 'on a regular basis' (Adéla, female, BA student) and 'there's no harm' in sexist comments, jokes, and ogling (Petr, male, PhD student).

Adéla's statement above suggests that softer forms of harassment are not constructed only as something *normal* but even as something *natural* and therefore *necessary*. Such behaviour is justified by the masculine nature—men are automatically identified with those who initiate harassment and are described as 'aggressors' (Marcel, male, BA student), 'animals' (Kateřina, female, MA student), someone 'who can't help it' (Heda, female, PhD student). Such a notion of sexual harassment corresponds to the 'biological/natural' model of sexual harassment [Tangri, Burt and Johnson 1982]. Harassment is considered a consequence of the natural attraction between men and women, and the aggressor's potential bad intention and abuse of a position of power are disregarded. Thus, the assumption goes, sexual harassment is not something bad or even unlawful because sexual instincts are so strong that they surface regardless of an individual's will. One consequence of such a notion is that harassment, including its impact, is downplayed. Harassment is understood as something individual, normal and harmless [Tangri, Burt and Johnson 1982: 34–36], as is illustrated in the following quotation: 'I think that it [flirting] is something that happens . . . we're people and have our weaknesses and can't avoid it.' (Heda, female, PhD student)

Sexual harassment is constructed as an extreme that lies outside our 'normal' world and our 'normal' everyday reality. This extreme is defined against other forms of common sexualised behaviour, which is described as something natural, normal, and even necessary.

Sexual harassment as someone else's problem

The ways in which victims of sexual harassment are regarded also contributes to the construction of sexual harassment as something remote. In the interviews it was possible to identify several dimensions that were related to victims of harassment: gender, age, place of origin, and personal characteristics. With these qualities victims of harassment are constructed as specific and 'not like me' and sexual harassment as a 'problem that doesn't relate to me'.

Sex is one of the most important dimensions in student's notions about characteristics of sexual harassment victims. In spontaneous statements sexual

harassment is almost exclusively related to men-aggressors and women-victims. If they talked about victims of sexual harassment, most students talked about girls or women, and if they mentioned aggressors, they talked exclusively about men. This is related to the fact that male students often do not admit that they could become the target of sexual harassment. That someone is a man automatically exempts him from the group of people at risk, as Šimon, a doctoral student, said: '... most importantly, I would not put up with it. And generally sexual harassment, it's more of a question of the relationship between a male teacher and female students than the relationship between a female teacher and male students.' The characteristics discussed below were therefore almost exclusively linked to women as victims of harassment.

In interviews female students appear in an ambivalent position: in both cases they are subjected to secondary victimisation: (1) On the one hand, they are the ones who become the target of harassment against their will but can't defend themselves; (2) on the other hand, they provoke harassment—whether by flirting with teachers or wearing provocative clothes or using other women's 'weapons'. It is men in particular who see women in this way, as the following quote illustrates: '... of course all the girls, they are aware of their position, women of course have their weapons. . . .' (Štěpán, male, PhD student) 'Well, a boy can't use, let's say, his charms the way a girl can. A girl can wear a short skirt to show off her legs, a deep neckline to show her breasts.' (Marcel, male, BA student) Women's abuse of their weapons is described as something simple and commonplace. Victims of sexual harassment are thus a priori suspect because they are likely to be the cause of harassment.

A certain type of secondary victimisation even appears in the case of victims who did not cause the harassment themselves but who are portrayed as those who were unable to defend themselves. Dimensions of personality, age, and place of origin were related to the capacity to defend oneself.

The 'type of personality' was a key element in the students' construction of a victim of harassment. According to students' statements sexual harassment does not happen to certain types of girls because they can deal with it thanks to their personality, character, and experience. They can set clear boundaries and are not afraid to make it plain that they will not put up with such behaviour. Those who do become victims of sexual harassment are portrayed as naïve and 'wimps who won't tell anybody' (Robert, male, MA student). The responsibility for sexual harassment is thus inconspicuously transferred from the perpetrator to the victim who is to blame for the annoyance because she 'let it happen' or was unable to say an emphatic 'No!'.

As for the role of 'age', older students are described as being able to defend themselves more easily because they have more experience and more courage than younger ones, who are considered to be inexperienced and naïve. Such an opinion is held by Lenka, for example, who stresses the active role of the victims themselves: 'In my opinion the older girls won't put up with it; they're much

older and are less afraid to speak about it with teachers or managers.’ (Lenka, female, PhD student) Gita sees the situation similarly and emphasises the powerlessness of young female students against a teacher’s advantage: ‘What can freshmen girls do?! Nothing!’ (Gita, female, PhD student)

In several interviews we can see a link between the victim of sexual harassment and the ‘place of origin’. In this context students constructed a dichotomy between ‘Prague’ and ‘the countryside’ which are related, in their eyes, to different upbringing, different experiences and especially a different capacity to defend oneself against harassment. While girls from the capital city of Prague are considered to be able to handle the issue and efficiently prevent it, are experienced and ‘know how things are’, country girls are often portrayed as naïve, downtrodden, and brought up in an old-fashioned way: ‘. . . it depends on what family you’re from and what environment. In Prague girls can usually defend themselves, they are able to get respect . . .’ (Šimon, male, PhD student)

Female students define themselves sharply against the ‘naïve country girls’, ‘young and inexperienced girls’, ‘those who provoke’, and those ‘who are not able to set clear boundaries of behaviour’. They depict themselves as experienced, savvy, and strong, able to defend themselves; therefore, sexual harassment does not concern them. Paradoxically this is also true in situations when they become victims of harsh forms of harassment such as Gita:¹² ‘I don’t know, I think that the thing is how the boundaries are defined. Maybe there are a lot of female doctoral students who don’t sweat it, but for me, to have some old geezer slap my butt, I have no need for that. It’s possible that they may let them do it and they behave accordingly . . .’ (Gita, female, PhD student) Some have experienced lighter forms of harassment, like Kateřina:¹³ ‘I have to say from my personal life that not many people have tried anything, I can act as if there is really a barrier.’ (Kateřina, female, MA student) Not defining their own experience as sexual harassment and constructing themselves as someone whom sexual harassment does not concern can be a form of defence, an effort to preserve one’s own dignity and identity, and a mark of resistance to the acceptance of a passive role in the whole incident [Basson and Botha 2010; Mott and Condor 1997].

The students thus subject potential victims of sexual harassment to secondary victimisation. They are a priori suspected of having provoked the situation because they have misused their women’s charms or were unable to stand up against it. They are naïve, young, and inexperienced, and women respondents defined themselves in opposition to them, seeing themselves as someone

¹² A teacher slapped Gita on the bottom several times. (Source: interview with Gita, Barriers project 2008)

¹³ Even though Kateřina was doing well in the course, she failed the oral examination twice. On the last attempt to pass the exam, when she finally succeeded, the teacher told her that she was so beautiful that she should not be surprised that he wanted to see her more than once. (Source: interview with Kateřina, Barriers project 2008)

to whom sexual harassment can't happen because no one 'takes liberties with them', because they are so experienced that they are able to handle the problem. The remoteness of sexual harassment is thus strengthened because, apart from sexual harassment being constructed as an extreme experience, the construction of the victim is highly stigmatising and victimising, incompatible with one's own self-image.

Factors related to labelling sexual harassment

Although there is a clear tendency among students not to label sexual harassment as sexual harassment, the analysis shows that there are certain features whose presence results in some behaviour being explicitly defined as sexual harassment. Like in foreign studies, the most important factors attached to sexual harassment being labelled as such were the explicit nature of sexual harassment, a power imbalance, the situational context, and the violation of personal boundaries.

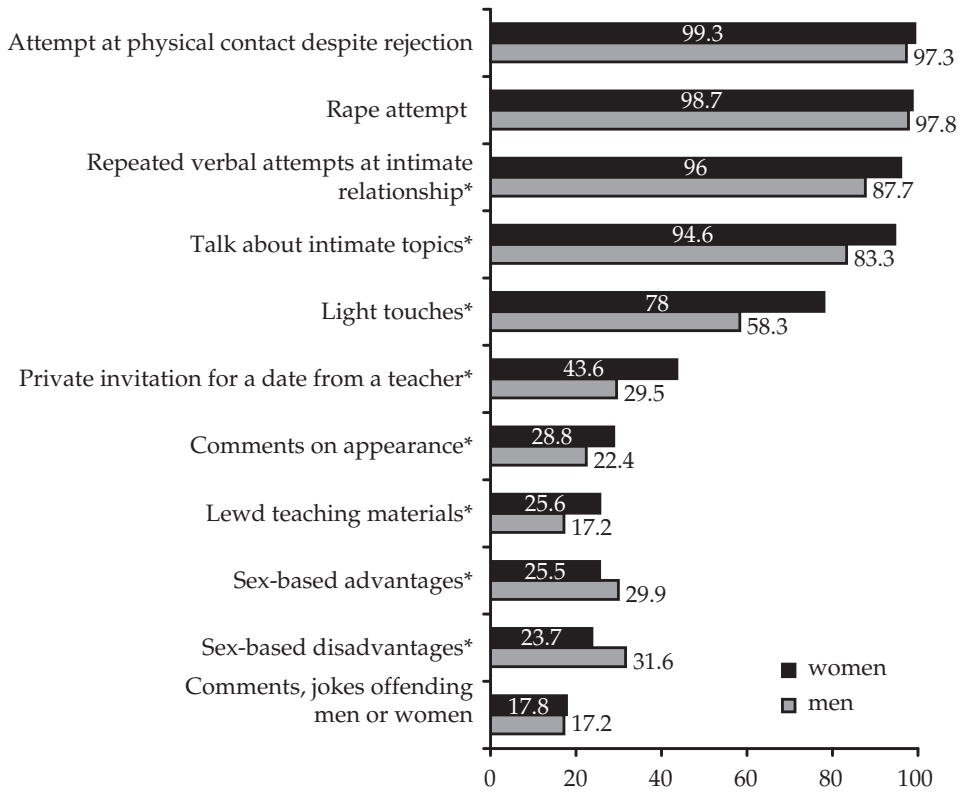
The explicit nature of sexual harassment

Foreign research studies [e.g. Kelley and Parsons 2000: 551; Biaggio and Brownell 1996; Crocker 1983] show that while explicit forms of sexual harassment that fall in the category of quid pro quo harassment, such as bribery, forced sexual activity, and sexual abuse, are often classified as sexual harassment, there is much less willingness to use the term sexual harassment to describe forms of sexual harassment which fall in the hostile environment category. Our research, like that of Smetáčková and Pavlík [2011], clearly confirms this fact on Czech data. It appears that there is a clear line which separates forms that are considered to constitute sexual harassment (which fall under sexual assault) from those that are not classified as sexual harassment (falling usually under the rubric of gender harassment) (see Figure 1).

In students' responses there are statistically significant gender differences. In line with foreign research results [e.g. Uggen and Blackstone 2004: 69; Hill and Silva 2005: 10–11] girls are more sensitive to and less tolerant of sexual harassment than boys. With the exception of sex-based (dis)advantage, which is considered to constitute sexual harassment by a significantly higher proportion of boys than girls, girls identified most other items to be sexual harassment more often than boys.

Forms of harassment clearly defined as sexual harassment included attempts at physical contact despite clear rejection, a rape attempt, repeated verbal attempts at an intimate relationship, and talk about intimate and personal topics. These items were identified as sexual harassment by at least 83% of male students and 94% of female students. The large percentages of students who agreed that

Figure 1. What behaviour constitutes sexual harassment? (% of positive responses)



Source: Barriers project. N = 703.

Note: In items marked with an asterisk (*) there are clear statistically significant differences in the responses of male and female students (χ^2 tested, significance level $\alpha=1\%$).

these forms constituted sexual harassment suggest that there is a high degree of consensus.¹⁴

A certain consensus, though not as strong, can be found with respect to forms that *are not* identified as sexual harassment. There is relative agreement among students that comments and jokes offending or denigrating men and women, sex-based advantages and disadvantages, comments on appearance, and use of lewd teaching materials do not constitute sexual harassment.

¹⁴ In view of the fact that students evaluated individual items on a yes/no scale, the percentage of agreement and disagreement attests to the degree of consensus. The closer the percentage is to the extremes 0 or 100, the higher the degree of consensus.

Between these two relatively clear groups there are forms of behaviour over which the students disagree. These forms include light touches, which female students in particular identified as sexual harassment, and an invitation on a private date, where there is some agreement between women and men that the item constitutes sexual harassment. With a reference to the results of the qualitative study these variations in responses can be explained by the fact that these forms are often tied to the situational context, and boundaries where sexual harassment begins are slippery and ambiguous and depend on the circumstances [Vohlídalová 2010].

The division of forms of harassment into explicit, which are usually labelled as harassment, and non-explicit, which are not considered to be harassment, was confirmed by the qualitative study, which showed that students most often associate various forms of physical contact or blackmail with sexual harassment. As Heda stated: '[sexual harassment] is about causing some unpleasant physical contact. . . it's simply a violation of a personal zone, which is unpleasant.' (Heda, female, PhD student)

Power imbalance

The power relationship between students and teachers is unique, and students are highly dependent on teachers. Experts agree that the power teachers can wield over students is indirect and much more subtle than in labour relations and is often underestimated or even denied by both parties [Rabinowitz 1996; Dziech and Weiner 1984; Skaine 1996; Uggen and Blackstone 2004]. The power imbalance in education is magnified by the age difference between teachers and students, as the latter are usually younger and inexperienced [Benson and Thompson 1982; Skaine 1996], and by the gender structure of the higher education sector. Most full and associate professors are men, while women occupy lower positions in the university hierarchy and constitute more than one-half of all students [Tenglerová 2010].

Students are aware of the power differences related to sexual harassment and link them specifically to problems with actively defending oneself. The element of power imbalance turns even a relatively benign, though several times repeated attempt to invite a student for coffee into a dilemma, as Klára,¹⁵ for example, described: 'Well, the exam was ahead and so I was afraid So I was not completely direct which is why it was not probably sufficient for him, the rejection.' (Klára, female, MA student) This quote well illustrates that acceptance

¹⁵ Klára was repeatedly invited by her teacher for coffee, although she always refused the invitation. According to her statement, these invitations were only a pretext, behind which she saw the teacher's attempt to ask her out. (Source: interview with Klára, Barriers project 2008)

or refusal of an invitation is not necessarily completely free in contexts of a power imbalance.

The aspect of power plays a key role in labelling sexual harassment. According to students, sexual harassment begins where one actor who is in an organisationally higher position (in this case the teacher) applies his dominance over another actor in a lower position (students). This definition of sexual harassment is linked in interviews with terms such as 'involuntariness' or 'force', as Štěpán, for example, stated: 'I guess it's difficult to define it [sexual harassment] generally. It is simply something that begins with some pressure on the other person.' (Štěpán, male, PhD student)

Helena, who encountered harassment from her teacher, when he asked her to send naked pictures of herself by ICQ in exchange for his 'supporting' her during a test, defined her experience as sexual harassment with a direct reference to force and involuntariness. When asked whether she would explicitly call this experience sexual harassment, she said: 'Well, I think it certainly was, because it was against my will. It was against my will and I got to a phase when I really didn't know what to do. If, if I should comply, I really, I was really desperate. I told myself that if I failed the exam, that would be a bummer, because I would have trouble passing into the next year, so I was toying with this idea. I know that it sounds almost disgusting and I feel embarrassed in front of myself now.' (Helena, female, MA student) The aspect of involuntariness magnified by the direct 'superiority' of the teacher is used here as the main argument why the experience is classified as sexual harassment.

The situational context: previous relationships between actors and the intention to act

The situational context also plays a role in sexual harassment being labelled as such, in particular whether a previous relationship existed between actors [Reilly et al. 1982; Weber-Burdin and Rossi 1982], and so does the the presence of an intention to act.

If the actors knew each other before and had a closer relationship, behaviour was not identified as sexual harassment, as Hana, for example, stated: 'It depends on what relationship you have had with the person. Because if you are closer—even with the teacher you can establish a more or less friendly relationship—then in that moment he can kiss you goodbye on the cheek.' (Hana, female, MA student) Personal closeness between a teacher and student justifies, in the students' eyes, forms of behaviour that in other contexts would be improper.

The intention to act, the effort to intentionally damage, abuse, denigrate, or harm, was seen as another important attribute for labelling sexual harassment as such. Conversely, behaviour engaged in for the purpose of amusement (sexist jokes are a typical example) and devoid of the intention to act is not usually labelled as sexual harassment.

Adéla, for example, sees the intention to act as a key aspect when she described the somewhat non-standard behaviour of a teacher toward female students in the following way: '... there was this teacher we had who exchanged text messages with female students and he wanted to meet them in cafes and so on. ... He offered me several times that if I needed help with anything, I could meet him anywhere, anytime, but I didn't see anything wrong with this, no sexual harassment. I trusted him that he wanted to help me.' (Adéla, female, BA student) She does not see invitations on private dates by the teacher as sexual harassment because he 'wanted to help her'.¹⁶

The violation of personal boundaries

Students also show a tendency to define sexual harassment in reference to the violation of personal boundaries and individual feelings of being a victim, which is a moment reflected also in legislative definitions and foreign anti-harassment policies. A significant portion of students link sexual harassment with an unwanted, unwelcome, and otherwise unpleasant or denigrating situation; a key moment is when such behaviour is perceived as such by the victim. Klára, for example, defined sexual harassment in this way: 'The way I see it is that [sexual harassment occurs] as soon as it starts becoming unpleasant. ... I guess everyone has the boundary defined differently.' (Klára, female, MA student) Individual perceptions of sexual harassment are, according to students, influenced by many factors, including one's personality, life experience, sexual openness, and sex. This way of defining sexual harassment, however, implies one significant problem for a formal definition of sexual harassment: in this perspective, its objective definition is ambiguous, if not impossible.

The violation of personal boundaries is usually mentioned as the moment that turns innocent behaviour into sexual harassment, not only in cases of verbal harassment (sexist comments, remarks, and jokes), but surprisingly also in the case of physical forms of harassment. Helena described it this way: '... the level of sensitivity is different for everyone and so for someone sexual harassment is the sexual act and for someone sexual harassment may be that someone touches them. I think that this really depends on the personality of a person. How he perceives it.' (Helena, female, MA student)

It can be concluded that labelling sexual harassment is a complex and multi-layered process that includes a number of dimensions which overlap, clash, and complement one another. In addition to personality (the violation of personal boundaries), the power structure of the relationship, personal closeness,

¹⁶ In this case I am not claiming that this behaviour constituted sexual harassment, even though it is not entirely standard behaviour for a teacher to keep trying to invite a student on a date; nevertheless, I use this quotation to illustrate one of the ways in which students construct the boundaries of sexual harassment.

and last but not least the actual nature of the behaviour play a role (especially the explicit nature and intention of such behaviour). The enumeration of the dimensions above is not exhaustive and it would be undoubtedly possible to find other ways to label sexual harassment. The dimensions explored above, however, are constructed by students as the most significant ones.

Conclusion

This article focused on the perceptions and constructions of sexual harassment through students' eyes and the gap between expert and individual definitions of sexual harassment. To understand how people perceive and define sexual harassment is crucial for explaining and understanding how they react to sexual harassment and why they often do not stand up against sexual harassment. It is not only the existence of an official definition but also the definition of sexual harassment and its boundaries by the actors involved that is a key aspect of the ability to fight and prevent sexual harassment [Powell 1986; Welsh et al. 2006; Lee 2001].

The analysis shows that students construct harassment as a remote problem that does not relate to them. It is perceived as an extreme experience violating all regular norms of interpersonal behaviour, and students do not admit for a minute that they could personally encounter such behaviour. They define themselves as strong unlike the victims of sexual harassment and have a tendency to see victims of harassment as having provoked such behaviour or being unable to defend themselves. It is women, younger students, country girls, and weak and naïve women who are seen as victims of sexual harassment. Responsibility for sexual harassment is thus transferred onto the victims of harassment.

As for the dimensions that are linked to the labelling of sexual harassment, we can identify a certain parallel to the legislative definition of sexual harassment. Czech legislation defines sexual harassment in reference to the intention of the offender, the unwelcome nature of the behaviour and—in addition to harsh forms—it also includes softer forms that fall under the category of hostile environment. Like the legislative definition, students stress the intention to act and the dimension of an individual's perception of the behaviour as unwelcome and as a violation of personal boundaries. At odds with the legislative definition, students identify sexual harassment only with explicit and physical forms of harassment and do not label hostile environment as harassment. In addition, they have a tendency to narrow down sexual harassment to forms based on the power hierarchies established by the organisational structure.

The definitions and constructions developed by the students are created in a certain cultural and power context. Czech society is not very gender sensitive [Weiner 2010; Havelková 1993; Šiklová 1997]; there is also little sensitivity towards gender discrimination [Křížková, Penner and Peterson 2010] and there is a tolerance of sexual harassment [Křížková, Maříkova and Uhde 2006]. As some authors

argue [Cairns 1997; Nicolson 1997], socialisation may play a role, too. We learn to accept certain forms of behaviour as an inherent part of our femininity and masculinity, which may often lead to sexual harassment being invisible. Another factor is that anti-harassment policies are not common at higher education institutions [Herbert 1997; Giuffre and Williams 1994]. Thus, students find themselves in a rather disadvantageous position vis-à-vis potential harassers among teachers, and often have to rely just on themselves.

If society at large endorses the values and goals of university education, such as meritocracy, equality in access, and the development of the talents and skills of all students, it is necessary to work towards creating a safe learning environment where power will not be abused and where discrimination will not occur, something to which higher education institutions are bound anyway by the Czech Education Act (No. 561/2004, Paragraph 2). It is therefore necessary to create a safe space for students to stand up against behaviour which they consider unwanted and harassing, to foster an environment where such forms of behaviour could be labelled for what they are, publicly condemned and redressed. As Catherine MacKinnon showed already in the 1970s, labelling and naming a problem is the first step to this problem being resolved [MacKinnon 1979].

Several findings emerging from this study could be considered for prospective anti-harassment university policies and campaigns: (1) it would be appropriate to focus on demythologising sexual harassment as something that students believe does not in principle concern them; (2) this demythologisation could also cover ideas about victims of harassment, especially in terms of their secondary victimisation (whether direct or indirect); (3) codices and policies may explain to students that although women in particular are at risk of sexual harassment, this does not mean that it cannot happen to other groups (e.g. men, LGBT, ethnic minorities); (4) codices and campaigns should explain that according to Czech legislation, illegal forms of sexual harassment do not involve only the physical, *quid pro quo* forms but also a wide range of hostile environment types of harassment; (5) last but not least, it would seem necessary to inform students that sexual harassment does not occur only in power hierarchies produced by the organisational structure but that these power inequalities co-exist with inequalities given by the gender order [MacKinnon 1979]. Harassment should be therefore described as a multi-layered phenomenon which can occur at various levels [Cleveland and Kerst 1993].

As for the implications for further research, since this study concentrated exclusively on the sexual harassment of students by teachers, future research should also focus on teachers' attitudes, experiences, and definitions of sexual harassment. The inclusion of this dimension could be helpful for a more nuanced understanding of the issue of sexual harassment in the Czech context as well as for explaining the reluctance to stand up against sexual harassment in higher education and in Czech society as a whole.

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