



# ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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A recent article focussing on sexual harassment and abuse in field-based sciences is important. It is not an easy read. It is disturbing. But all archaeologists should be aware of the data presented, which are based on the results of a 2013 survey of those in academic disciplines where working in field locations is routine. Archaeologists should acknowledge the severity of sexual harassment and abuse in the field, and address it.

The article is “Survey of Academic Field Experiences (SAFE): Trainees Report Harassment and Assault,” published in the July 16, 2014, issue of *PLoS ONE*. The authors are anthropologists Kathryn Clancy, Robin Nelson, Julianne Rutherford, and Katie Hinde. Overall, 666 people participated in the survey, representing 32 disciplines. Approximately 75 percent were from the United States. Close to one quarter of the respondents identified specifically as archaeologists.

The numbers cannot, and should not, be ignored. Sixty-four percent of respondents claim to have personally experienced sexual harassment and more than 20 percent claim to have experienced sexual assault in field locations. Not surprisingly, females are targeted much more frequently than males. The survey indicates that sexual harassment and assault are overwhelmingly aimed at trainees (students and postdocs), and the primary perpetrators are males senior to them professionally. Besides being the target, experiencing sexual harassment and assault may also include witnessing it. More than 70 percent of respondents reported having either directly experienced or been told about sexual harassment at their field sites. The survey further indicates that there is limited awareness of policies dealing with harassment and mechanisms for reporting, and that of those that did report, only 18 percent were satisfied with the outcome.

The implications of this survey for archaeology should be obvious. I can't imagine anyone believing that archaeology would be better with fewer women. Yet harassment and abuse of women in field locations, whether targeted at students or at those on a career track, surely drives many away.

Although the survey is not specific to archaeology, the fact that almost one quarter of the respondents identified as archaeologists is significant. It moves the discussion of sexual harassment and abuse in archaeological field locations out of the realm of anecdotes, campfire chatter, oral traditions, rumors, and innuendo and beyond the “culture of fieldwork” and “what happens in the field, stays in the field” mentalities. It provides important data to move forward.

There are multiple ways of addressing sexual harassment and abuse in field locations in archaeology. As suggested by Clancy, Nelson, Rutherford, and Hinde (2014), because supervisors are key to determining workplace culture, principal investigators have the power and responsibility to make positive changes, including raising awareness, creating guidelines for respectful behavior, and adopting reporting mechanisms.

Archaeology field schools can be a good way of setting standards. When preliminary results of the survey first surfaced in April 2013, I was preparing for an annual archaeology field school that I direct each summer. I immediately established a zero-tolerance policy of sexual harassment for the field school (incidents of sexual abuse are to be reported to the police) and discussed it with the class on the first day. The policy was based on university policies, but it was tailored specifically to the archaeology field school. Students were given handouts with the policy that included not only a definition of harassment (eg., unwanted advances, comments, and jokes) but also multiple clear lines of reporting, none of which included females reporting to a male on the project. The lines of reporting included telephone numbers. Feedback from students on this policy has been positive.

Archaeology field schools have very much become a rite of passage in entering the profession in many regions, so they are a good place to establish a culture of fieldwork that does not include sexual harassment and abuse. I let my students know that every field experience is different and that when they go on to other field projects they are likely to discover different field

customs, but that experiencing sexual harassment is never acceptable.

Field school selection committees may also be used to give at least some signal to potential applicants that the field school is a safe environment. The selection committee for the field school I direct, for example, always includes two or three women (anthropologists and sometimes a physical geographer), as well as myself.

In addition to field schools, it may also be worthwhile to consider explicitly covering sexual harassment and abuse in other courses. Over the past year (since the preliminary survey results were released in 2013), I have mentioned the survey results in other classes I teach, including introductory courses. I don't particularly like showing a dark side of archaeology, but I think it derelict not to let students know the perils they may face.

Other ways of addressing sexual harassment in the field include making all those involved in fieldwork aware of departmental, institutional, and company policies regarding harassment, as well as potential legal ramifications. The survey indicated that many were not aware that such policies existed. Where policies do not exist, they should be created. Associations of professional archaeologists would be well-served by explicitly addressing harassment in the codes of conduct and ethics as well.

My own experience suggests that many do not clearly understand what constitutes harassment, not recognizing, for example, that a joke or being witness to comments may be harassment. It may be helpful, therefore, to make it clear to everyone on a field project what constitutes harassment and the potential penalties.

It is important not to forget that the primary targets are usually the most vulnerable—students—and they may not understand what is acceptable. I was reminded of this in the midst of writing this short piece. One of my students emailed me to let me know that she thought she was currently being sexually

harassed, but wasn't sure. She wasn't sure whether it was harassment, and she wasn't sure what to do. She showed me the correspondence. It was disgusting. A predator, a creep in a position of authority, was suggesting that he could help with her career in archaeology. But he wanted to touch her first. It fit the pattern. The target was an archaeology "trainee." The perpetrator was a male senior to her in the profession. I am glad that this student emailed me. She contacted me because she knew my attitudes towards sexual harassment, and she didn't know what to do. I offered some suggestions and advised her that I could act on her behalf if she preferred.

The study by Clancy, Nelson, Rutherford, and Hinde (2014) is important for field-based sciences, which I imagine will lead to others, including some specific to archaeology. The authors recognize some of the biases, including the potential for both over-reporting and under-reporting by those who have experienced sexual harassment and abuse. In the case of those identifying as archaeologists, I imagine that the survey is strongly biased towards those in academia. Overall, the overwhelming majority of respondents identified as students and faculty. Only three percent identified as "employees" and less than seven percent identified as "non-academic." It would be interesting and important to see whether there would be similar results from a survey in commercial archaeology.

It is unfortunate that sexual harassment and abuse persist, in archaeology and elsewhere. But it does exist, and it should be addressed. Staying silent and doing nothing, especially for those in positions of power, is no longer acceptable.

### Reference Cited

- Clancy, Kathryn B.H., Robin G. Nelson, Julienne N. Rutherford, and Katie Hinde  
 2014 Survey of Academic Field Experiences (SAFE): Trainees Report Harassment and Assault. *PLoS ONE* 9(7):e102172. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0102172.