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Hello Kitty Goes to College: Poems About Harassment in the Academy

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Abstract

This essay presents a series of poems that fictionalize professors' and students' experiences and narratives of sexual harassment in the academy through the use of the cartoon character, Hello Kitty. The poems demonstrate administrative and fellow professors' reactions to the standpoints of women of color, untenured professors, and students that experience harassment. The essay argues that a fictional account is necessary to represent these experiences given the academy's prevalent power structure. The use of feminist and critical race theory places the poems in the context of the harassment literature and demonstrates how reactions to the presentation of standpoints are an important area to study for understanding how harassment is perpetuated and considered normal behavior in the university system.

Keywords: academe, critical race theory, feminist standpoint theory, harassment, poetry.

Hello Kitty Goes to College: Poems about Harassment in the Academy

Across the academy, sexual harassment has been a wide area of study for the past two and a half decades with the examination of issues from the responses to harassment (Clair, McGoun, & Spirek, 1993; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Handy, 2006), its relation to power (Wilson & Thompson, 2001) and truth (Brewis, 2001), types of harassers (Lucero, Middleton, Finch, & Valentine, 2003), men and women's standpoints (Dougherty, 1999), ethical dilemmas (Dougherty & Atkinson, 2006), and the construction of masculinity (Bird, 1996), to the effects of sexual harassment (McGuire, Dougherty, & Atkinson, 2006; "Our Stories," 1992). Within the field of Communication Studies, sexual harassment has been examined primarily from an organizational or institutional perspective (Clair, 1993; Solomon & Williams, 1997; Townsley, 2004), whereas a few studies have turned the glance inward to examine the ways sexual harassment is organized in the academy (Dougherty & Smythe, 2004; Dziech & Weiner, 1990; Townsley & Geist, 2000; Wood, 1992). More recently attention has focused on bullying in the workplace (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006; Simpson & Cohen, 2004), demonstrating the continued importance of studying workplace harassment.

Issues such as the shock and helplessness associated with initial harassment episodes (Kramarae, 1992; Namie & Namie, 2000), the encouragement provided to harassers by ignoring or laughing off their harassing behaviors (Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Patton, 2004a), the variations in harassing behavior based on race, gender, age, and status (Cho, 1997; Ontiveros, 1997), the common responses suggested by organizations and researchers (e.g., telling a superior, keeping records, writing the harasser a letter asking that they stop harassing) (Paludi & Barickman, 1991; Petrocelli & Repa, 1999), the importance of a collective response to harassment (Langelan, 1993; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006), the relationship of harassing behaviors to other forms of abuse of power (Collins, 2004), the grooming and testing of victims (including rape-testing) (Dzeich & Weiner,

1990; Langelan, 1993), the consistent protection of the harasser by the organization (Clair, 1993; Namie & Namie, 2000) were all issues we read about, observed, and/or experienced. Often we were shocked as we read about the premeditated strategies harassers use because they paralleled what we had experienced in our own situation (Dziech & Weiner, 1990; "Our stories," 1992).

While all of this work has been central in understanding the ways sexual harassment works and is sustained, we are interested in providing poems that have the potential to not only inform, but persuade and embody through affective connections. Scholarly attention on poetry as a means of representation or embodiment is not unusual (e.g., Faulkner 2005, 2006; González, 1998). B. H. Fairchild (2007) considers poetry's task of embodiment to work "by bringing the tenuous emotion or subtle state of consciousness or elusive idea into a closer relation with lived experience—with, in effect, the country of the body" (p. 55). Therefore, in this essay we use research poetry with fictionalized details as a means to demonstrate our own and our students' experiences of harassment in the academy and to write about the context and content of harassment in a manner that disrupts a continued normalization of it. We label the poems here as evocative narratives and stories of the flesh that report research in an embodied rather than representational format with the intent to show lives as they are lived, understood and experienced, especially because the experience of harassment is a bodily experience. Fairchild (2007) argued that "when poetry moves away from the body, it atrophies" (p. 68).

Our turn to fiction writing is also informed by performance scholars such as Pollock (1998) and Pelias (2005) who both argue for the use of performative writing as an alternative form of scholarly representation. While Pollock (1998) describes performative writing as evocative in that it brings the reader in contact with other worlds, Pelias (2005) argues, "Performative writing features lived experience, telling, iconic moments that call forth the

complexities of human life" (p. 418). Pelias (2005) elaborates that "performative writing is a highly selective camera, aimed carefully to capture the most arresting angles" (p. 418). Making our writing both performative and fictional allows us to represent the experience of harassment in a format that creates a potential for activism and contends with representational issues of empowerment and disempowerment. As Frank (2000) states, "There is a possibility of portraying a complexity of lived experience in fiction that might not always come across in a theoretical explication, even one that is concerned with elucidating the complexity of power relations and human interactions" (p. 483).

We further acknowledge the politics of our methodology, as it is greatly informed by critical race and feminist theories that are driven by both concerns for social justice and in many cases alternative means of representation and theorizing. Both critical race theorists and feminists, particularly feminists of color, argue for the importance of storytelling or narrative in the representation of knowledge and everyday experience (i.e., Christian, 1990; Delgado, 1996) and acknowledge the everydayness or pervasiveness of racism and sexism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Essed, 1991). Blending feminist and critical race perspectives, scholars such as Jordan (1997), Davis and Wildman (1997), Taylor (1997), Ontiveros (1997), Davis (1997), and Cho (1997) have examined sexual harassment in various sectors of society. We see the project we undertake here building upon this previous work as well as embodying hooks' (1989) call to talk back to oppressive ideologies and social injustices while giving testimony to our experiential knowledge or theories of the flesh (Collins, 2000; 2004; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Echoing hooks' call and in many ways reflecting the goals of both feminist and critical race theories, Pelias (2005) highlights the way the personal and political reflect upon each other in performative writing; "It starts with the recognition that individual bodies provide a potent

database for understanding the political and hegemonic systems to write on individual bodies" (p. 420). The blending of these perspectives makes us attentive to the issue of positionality as articulated by Alcoff (1988), which is concerned with the contexts and social locations in which individuals are placed rather than locating identity as a static category. Thus, examinations of experience tell us a great deal about ideological formations, power, and the context for harassing behaviors and responses. Elaborating on the power of experience through the theory of the flesh and poetic representation Anzaldúa (1981) argues,

> You can theorize through fiction and poetry; it's just harder. It's an unconscious kind of concept. Instead of coming in through the head with the intellectual concept, you come in through the backdoor with the feeling, the emotion, the experience. But if you start reflecting on that experience you can come back to the theory. (p. 263)

These methodologies, that give central important to experience, voice, and the body, underlie our commitment to unpacking and revealing the ways that the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality are central and often unacknowledged aspects of the violence perpetuated against women in the academy (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). It is our hope that the poems we offer will actualize the "performance of possibilities" offered by Madison (1998) which implicates the audience/reader into action and reflection. Furthermore, Pelias (2005) argues, "Performative writing also often beckons empathy, allowing others to not only see what the writer might see but also to feel what the writer might feel. It is an invitation to take another's perspective" (p. 419).

The poems here express harassment narratives through the use of a well-known cartoon character, Hello Kitty. Her narration of harassment from student and faculty perspectives is a means to bring the audience into the setting as participants and "co-discoverers" (see Krizek,

1998). As such, Hello Kitty represents an amalgam of women and students' voices; the situations and feelings we write about are based on actual events, experiences, and ideas recorded as well as our analysis of the relationships between them. The result is an expressive series of poems that shows the analysis and embodies the "affective feel of the experience" of harassment in the academy as well as the "cognitive 'truth' of it" (Rinehart, 1998) while not forgoing the "doing" of the work as Krizek (1998) emphasizes:

> Creative writing can not be employed as a methodological shortcut. Only the meticulous application of the methods of fieldwork, including the analysis of the fruits of that fieldwork…can direct with any fidelity the recoding of the contexts, characters, and dialogic content of the cultural setting presented in the report. (p. 107)

To emphasize the importance of craft and aesthetic concerns, these poems have been work-shopped in four poetry classes and undergone numerous revisions based on feedback related to clarity, the music of the lines, the magic of narrative content, and believability (see Faulkner, 2007).

Other writings on harassment in the academy include anonymous narratives by academics in communication; anonymous because in the academy telling such stories may hurt a person's career ("Our Stories," 1992). This represents another reason for fictionalized poetry, fears of retribution for speaking of harassment as a normative and protected behavior. These fears precipitated our desire for a series of poems as a kind of qualitative case study that could highlight the context and texture of harassment, inform previous findings on harassment, and possibly allow for the discovery of "*previously unspoken, unknown things about culture and communication*" (Goodall, 2000, p. 191).

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Hello Kitty

> Q: Why doesn't Hello Kitty have a mouth?
> A: Hello Kitty speaks from her heart. She is Sanrio's ambassador to the world who isn't bound to one certain language.
> -from Sanrio.com

Has:
no mouth, oblong black eyes, a yellow oval nose
like a butterscotch that melts in your palm.
She always wears a bow over her left ear
in some cute color like candied apple.

Her Lifestyle:
She lives in a suburban cottage
with her mom, dad and twin sister
(who wears a bow over her right ear).
During the city commute she works,
records ideas in her red lined notebook
like college could help her become
a better business cat.

How Others Describe Her (Select One):
She's a corporate whore who peddles products-
lip gloss, toaster ovens, timers, stickers, chop sticks.
She uses her eyes and nose to sell
pink and purple products to cool kids,
a magenta gloss over subliminal power.
Some scholars say she's no feminist cat,
yet she yells with her eyes, black with bitchy rage.
Notice the Hello Kitty vibrator on her office shelf.
Is her mouthlessness a well-chosen silence
like a hunger strike of protest,
a transgendered case against the ease of cutting a hole?

What Hello Kitty could do with a mouth
if you glossed in an oval with her new lipstick line:
She'll tell you later.

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"It is hard to tell the story of a thousand ordinary and seemingly inconsequential references that say to someone: 'You are a woman' with the underlying implication 'and therefore both different and inferior'" (Narrative 31, quoted in "Our stories," 1992, p. 385).

As we draw on this series of poems to flesh out some of the issues relevant to sexual harassment in the academy, we start with silence. Because the character, Hello Kitty, has no mouth, we consider her image a visual and apt representation of this silence and the potential power in it. Silence can be a form of resistance (Clair, 1993); it can be a refusal to go along with "jokes" and "innocent" comments. But a silent (though glaring) harassee or one who makes a point to avoid a harasser can be blamed for not fighting the harassment (e.g., Jensen & Gutek, 1982). Yet speaking carries sanctions as well, such as being called a bitch, disgruntled, a malcontent who insists on airing dirty laundry, who goes "outside" to complain. "What is forthright and bold in men is considered aggressive and bitchy—and noncollegial—in women" (Toth, 1988, p. 45). Communication research illustrates that in many arenas a statement or behavior attributed to a woman is judged more harshly than the same behavior performed by a man (see Crawford, 1995). As Sandler (1988) puts it, "Even when men and women act the same, their behavior is viewed differently. He is 'assertive'; she is 'aggressive' or 'hostile.' He 'lost his cool', implying it was an aberration; she's 'emotional' or 'menopausal.' Thus her behavior is devalued, even when it is the same as his" (p. 151).

In contrast, women with a feminist orientation were more likely to view behaviors as sexually harassing and offensive (Berryman-Fink & Riley, 1997). And a recent study on perceptions of sexual harassment demonstrated that students who assumed that "no means no" considered any type of victim resistance, whether verbal or physical, to indicate the victim was being sexual harassed (Osman, 2007). However, students who believed that in sexual situations "no means yes" (token resistance) perceived behaviors as sexually harassing only when both verbal and physical resistance were present. In other words, rather than believing women or questioning common gendered stereotypes, the interpretation of the sexual harassment situation

often depends on an observer's pre-existing assumptions, regardless of a specific response of resistant silence, speaking, or physical resistance.

The evaluation of "woman as problem" contributes to attempts to shut down claims of sexual harassment and gender discrimination, thus naturalizing harassment (Townsley & Geist, 2000). This climate of pathologizing or misrepresenting women's behavior is indicative of what Alcoff (2003) terms a larger culture of complaint which "suggests that anyone who can claim victim status happily does so and proceeds to whine with an attitude of self-righteous martyrdom" (p. 4). This assumption makes it unnecessary to distinguish minor grousing from pointing out serious problems; all are trivialized as whining.

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Hello Kitty Goes to College

I. *First Semester*
Her business professor stares
at the red K sewn on the butt
of her sweats as she slinks
toward a desk in the front row.
"My best work from the self-designed line"
she confesses when he wants to know
"why K?" in the hallway
after supply chain class. He checks
attendance during her group's talk
on surplus stock. His voice makes
her whiskers vibrate, the K on her top
shrinks under his incessant gaze.
But this is just her professor
she thinks. In lecture, he makes
Tom and Jerry jokes, laughs
at how the cat always
gets into tight spots.
H.K. considers she's the cat
for the mouse, but she's just
a student, this is just a joke.
During office hours,
her advisor tells her
"Honey, professors are just bores
with arrested development. Learn to fit

the system, get your degree." H.K. takes
this advice, enjoys the library
with the stuffed couches
and row after row of shelved books
that smell like possibility. She feels
smart and hip with her good grades
and pledge to the honor society
headed by her business professor.

II. *H.K. Discovers She's Not White*
When it gets colder on campus
and snow piles around her dorm
like used kitty litter, H.K. takes the bus
to her only night class avoiding
salty paws and snow ball fights
with the freshmen boys who chant
as she crosses the quad. Tonight,
some men ride the bus and snicker
"A.I." as H.K. pushes to the back
of the bus to meet Keroppi and Jodie.
She doesn't know what it means,
talks of her new idea for school supplies.
The outside bar voices continue, "Asian Invasion.
Asian Invasion stop taking our scholarships."
H.K. wants to tell them she pays
her way with her own body, her line
of clothing. But her friends are faster.
"Stupid Crackers. You can't even fill out
your own applications." She just watches
the green frog and orange dog
shout back as the boys exit the bus.

III. *The Visual Aid*
On the power point slide,
a leukemia-ridden cat cowers
while doctors examine innards
displayed on the metal exam table.
H.K. pictures her own paws
tied down with twine
in the vet's office,
licks between her claws
when she hears the warning voices-
See what wearing no collar
means? How hanging out with
stray cats brings sickness
to inchoate kittens?- But H.K.

likes how they make their dens
wherever they please, thinks
them audacious and infinitely cool
like some kind of queer po-mo cats.
When she sees the picture
blown up on the class screen
and later taped up
in the teaching assistant's office
as an example of a great visual aid,
her hair scratches her skin,
she pants, overheated.
When no one is watching
she rips it off the wall,
shreds it with her paws
and pees on it, just in case.

When she passes by her professor's door, Hello Kitty spits on his creepy poetry.

Or she would, had she gone through with the plastic mouth surgery. That feminist class she took last semester slackened her spine in the surgeon's office. She felt like a naughty kitten dangling in big mother's jaw and left sans alteration. H.K.'s classmates sighed that *actually having no mouth* authenticates Muted Group Theory better than their final project –a duct-taped mouth protest of male language outside the football team's practice room. Still, when she passes by his elegies to dead cats, sonnets for weepy relatives and speaking proper English, she feels a tangled hair ball pushing up the back of her throat, an uncontrollable cough to exhume her fear, a sandpaper tongue that could work sick ink off the paper. H.K. fights her desire for words that would erase the taped up lines of trash, stops the professor from pressing his chair too close to her tail.

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"Academic organizational cultures are shaped such that they are particularly susceptible to chronic sexual harassment" (Dougherty & Smythe, 2004).

Sexual harassment grows out of and contributes to a particular academic climate, one in which lack of respect, denigration, discrimination, name calling, objectification and sexualization of female learners and scholars is normalized. It supports the definitions and assumptions of hegemonic masculinity and a larger patriarchal culture. As the authors of *The lecherous professor* put it, "'University living is male living on male terms,' and women discover that one of the easiest ways to violate those terms is to raise troublesome issues that call attention to gender" (Dziech & Weiner, 1990, p. 151). Stoltenberg (1989, p. 23) notes that for those

sustained by hegemonic masculinity, “there is always the critical problem of how to manage one’s affairs so that one always has available a supply of sustenance in the form of feminine deference and submission.” Thus, women are encouraged to be quiet and play the game, not questioning the inequities and power differentials that govern the space. Hawkins’s (1994) exit interviews with women academics indicated many left their positions because of sexual and gender harassment, under representation and isolation of women, inadequate and/or inaccurate feedback regarding performance, discouraging stories about women, and lack of support.

When the harassee is a student, the problems can be resolved through attrition; going through a formal complaint process can make one feel tired and worn down, confuse the issues, and abate anger. A lecherous professor can feel safe and perhaps even sanctioned when a student transfers or graduates. When female faculty are involved, the younger women may be more assertive about speaking of harassment, issues of equity, and advocating for fair policies, however, they are successful to the extent that they recognize “one must be a colleague first and a woman second” (Dziech & Weiner, 1990, p. 56). Attacked for not being collegial, and unable to change the toxic climate, female professors and staff may also move on or disengage, leaving fewer to glare and/or fight.

This situation is further exacerbated for faculty of color; their presence is often viewed as a challenge to the Whiteness of academia, and they are, in many cases, expected simply to assimilate (Kersey-Matusiak, 2004). The harasser’s feelings of safety strengthen and his problematic behaviors may escalate particularly against women of color because, as Collins (2004) writes describing the situation of Black middle class women, the difficulty of balancing the image of “the modern mammy” depends on maintaining the necessary ambition and aggressive behavior required for middle class professions with the subordination to White and/or

male authority. She argues that “aggression is acceptable just as long as it is appropriately expressed for the benefit of others. Aggression and ambition for oneself is anathema” (p. 140). Thus, once women are no longer “useful” to, complicit with, or malleable to white and/or male authority, their construction as a problem intensifies.

What types of behaviors constitute sexual harassment? Here we focus on behavior that would define a “hostile work environment,” rather than “quid pro quo” sexual harassment in which a harassee is promised a reward if she complies with sexual requests by someone who has power over her (or punishment if she refuses). Verbal behavior that contributes to a hostile work environment includes:

> intimidating, coercive or offensive sexual jokes, persistent requests for dates, nonreciprocal types of compliments, demeaning references to women present or absent, anonymous or signed notes and letters; calling women crazy, sexual remarks, paternalistic or sarcastic tone of voice, teasing, and suggestive or insulting sounds including whistling and sucking. (Kramarae, 1992, p. 101)

Specific examples include dirty jokes which often disparage women’s intellect, seriousness, academic commitment, and focus on women’s physicality, and comments that do the same by diverting attention away from a woman student’s work. “They often make women uncomfortable because essentially private matters related primarily to the sex of the student are made to take precedence over the exchange of ideas and information” (Sandler, 1988, p. 148). Women are viewed in sexual terms and conceived of as belonging to a broad category of “women” with limited intellectual ability and likelihood of failure, rather than as individual women capable of scholarly achievement. Harassing behaviors also include staring, policing women’s movements/activities, or stalking. Taylor and Conrad (1992, p. 411) note incidents depicting how

"direct physical domination is rehearsed, implied, and accompanied by male violation of victims' 'private' space in the organization." In each instance the woman is not seen as a scholar or learner but is sexualized and objectified. She is meant to realize this and become intimidated so that she does not threaten hegemonic (white) male self-concepts and dominance.

Hegemonic masculinity depends on women's sexual objectification (Stoltenberg, 1989). Male/female difference is assumed and construed to mean male superiority; in other words, men often "see the world through 'sex-coloured glasses' in order to make themselves so much more than mere women" (Kramarae, 1992, p. 116). As Stoltenberg (1989, p. 48) puts it "once [a male] objectifies that person—once he reduces the person in his mind to the object he desires—then the person, to him, is by definition not a real *subject* like himself" (emphasis in original). The distance created through objectification allows men to "depersonalize the oppression of women" (Bird, 1996, p. 123). Hegemonic masculinity and sexual harassment thrive in academic settings in spite of ideals of gender equality and intellectual growth for all.

The Classroom

When a professor shuts his door and begins class, there is often no one in the classroom who is sensitized to harassing behaviors or who would challenge the person in charge of their grade. Given academic freedom issues, classrooms can rarely be monitored by outsiders. Dziech & Weiner (1990), painting the profile of the lecherous professor argue, "Even the most public kind of harassment, sexist language, is carried out within the sanctity of the individual classroom" (p. 156). The classroom may also be sexualized through jokes, asides, topics of discussion, questions, and gestures. Further characterizing the lecherous professor: "Students sometimes refer to him as 'hands,' 'touchy-feely,' or 'mouth.' Colleagues describe him as 'patronizing,' 'always performing,' 'convinced of his own cuteness'" (Dziech & Weiner, 1990,

p. 120). Harassers in the classroom can hide behind “intellectual discussion,” “current social issues,” and “innocent conversation,” and like other types of sexual predators, maneuver to obtain additional positions in which they can sexually harass (e.g., advisor, club sponsor, graduate coordinator). Once in these positions, the harasser can offer students opportunities that the students believe are related to their ability and intelligence (Dziech & Weiner, 1990; “Our stories,” 1992).

A recent representative survey of undergraduates at U.S. colleges and universities by the American Association of University Women uncovered that 62% of college students experienced sexual harassment (MSNBC, 2006). Reactions to harassment can leave students less confident; students may feel uneasy, may call him (with an uncomfortable laugh) a “pervert,” or report to each other in incredulous voices the “crazy” things said in their class. Since women are sexualized, disrespected, and trivialized in many settings, students may not consider that it is their professor’s *job* to see and treat them as learners. The lack of oversight, large power differential between student and professor, and student naivety make it easy for students to assume that their professor’s harassing behavior is normal and thus acceptable.

Graduate teaching assistants may have more awareness but are more beholden than undergraduates to the department’s professors—the director of graduate studies, the course director, their advisor and committee members—those who in so many ways can make their life easier or miserable. Teaching assistants may be encouraged or forced to contribute to the normalization of a sexualized classroom environment. Additionally, graduate students themselves are harassed and “the effects of these harassment experiences [are] personally alienating, disempowering, and lingering. By violating the student’s emerging self-image as

academic professionals, these experiences undercut the women's confidence in their intellectual ability" (Strine, 1992, p. 395).

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Dissertation Abstracts International

Feminist Standpoint Theory: An Examination by a Post Modern Two-Dimensional Cat with No Mouth and 22,000 Products Bearing Her Image.

Dr. H. Kitty had wanted to title her dissertation, *Ode to the University,* like a love letter to ideas, to chance and other marginal characters without traditional mouths or white teeth. Her committee balked: standpoint theory and self-narratives were quite enough. Other departments would question the methods, not tenure such love gut epistemology. During the defense, the token male member screamed her seminal argument was the "pissy cat position." H.K. wiped his spit off her whiskers with her camouflage hair bow, slipped a blank piece of paper down the conference room table. One by one, the members held the clean sheet as if it were a twisted student evaluation. Only the bisexual lesbian clapped, said Kitty's "right-on-response disallows the difficulty with our difference." H.K. considered ripping herself a mouth with her advisor's fountain pen, kicking the phantom pain in the teeth. Instead, she underlined new parts of her story with a Barbie highlighter, and let them pass her with their caveats and reservations.

First Academic Job

H.K. won her degree, took
a position pasted with diversity
and groups historically ignored.
She assumed that meant different
orientations to being human.
At the interview, someone asked
why she never includes the harasser's
point of view, is critical of Robert's Rules?

Colleagues delighted by her character
standpoint, her popularity with all kinds
of girls and heads of grant agencies,
gave her important assignments
and committee work to fill
cat quotas across the colleges.

Only later, did she not feel
especially encouraged
when outside her office door,
they snickered at cat-in-heat jokes,
comments about smelly tuna
sandwiches and compound nipples.

***

"They come to their first academic jobs believing that things will be different now—that they will pursue knowledge for its own sake and be rewarded with acclaim from their colleagues" (Toth, 1988, p. 36).

Universities may collect different sorts of bodies without changing the power dynamics or challenging the idea that real professors are male and white (Toth, 1988). The idea that members of a diverse professorate would draw on their own non-mainstream experiences is often ignored. In addition, more service is often expected of white women and men and women of color, but this may not be valued or rewarded and can interfere with time for research, thus justifying denial of tenure (e.g., Hawkins, 1994). Many faculty of color are caught in the bind of having extra service because they are some of the few representatives of historically marginalized groups and are thus asked to be on multiple committees as the voice of diversity (McBride, 2005). Women of color must often find ways to negotiate this extra service in addition to their research agendas. Additionally challenging the university climate, Patton (2004b) questions the rhetoric of "home" used by universities by asking, "If a university is 'home' and an institution that welcomes a diverse range of people, how do we account for retention rate concerns and the 'chilly climate' women experience?" (p. 69). Hu-DeHart (2000) argues that while departments may actively hire because they desire diversity, they do little to adjust the climate of the department in anticipation of diversity. As a result, the new faculty member is expected to assimilate into the existing culture without complaint, thus covering up or giving up what makes them "diverse" in the first place.

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After the Faculty Meeting

H.K. still believed in the academy
though meetings like street brawls

left feminist cat scholar bodies piled
in naked postmodern heaps beside her chair.

She believed even when she took her standpoint
to the harassment advocate who chuckled,

told her to consider being spayed
because it would help her emotionality-

even through stories of tenured professors
having to rape in the middle of the quad

in bright daylight with a metal weapon
and maybe a drunken student party

before the possibility of firing would rise
past a personnel meeting to the provost.

After all, many skillful eligible bachelors
among their faculty deserved a date.

Jodie, the canine hire, howled
through departmental dog jokes

of chewed-up essays and sexy mailmen:
Why are dogs so obedient?

Because they sport choke collars.
Jodie started chanting in the copy room,

> Getting ass in your classes:
> one semester's pay.
>
> Being an ass to your colleagues:
> one year's pay.
>
> Getting a fair job:
> impossible.

H.K. preferred the department's fresh talk
of cutting edge curriculums and saucy students

though the lecherous professor leered
through her working cats research talk,

asked her to retype the departmental notes
because her *cat scratch* made his eyes water.

Even then, she believed in her colleagues
and the idea of them wearing stripes and bows.

When Hello Kitty Registers for the Working Cats Conference, Security Confiscates Her Catnip.

She forgot the stems and buds in her red pleather briefcase, late for the train, her presentation on supply chains. The marketing staff refused to accept her line of toothbrushes with bright blue and black bristles. *Why would girls want to wash out their mouths with colors like a healing bruise? What about hot-pant pink?* H.K. skulked out of the office, tossed a toothbrush over her right ear, a substitute for her silent screech and yowl. On the train, she tracks the girls, the up and down pistons of their mouths crushing gum, how they clamor over the sounds of wheel clack on track with fresh pink vocal chords. At the hotel, H.K. stalks to her meeting room and tries to slink up to the podium. A guard grabs her paw, crinkles the stash in her Ziploc. "I won't lie, you can't bring this in." He won't look at her mouthlessness, instead stares at her chest, asks if she has more. H.K. can't find a pen to write a protest: other conference goers get their coffee, breath mints, and tobacco buzz. She only craves a familiar smell, something to get her through. When she settles on top of a chair, a colleague smiles and lights a cigar; she dreams the burning tip blazes up her whiskers and burns a brown hole through her hair bow.

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Institutional responses

"One percent of employees who are harassed make formal complaints. . . . Complaining about it can often just bring on more" (Kramarae, 1992, p. 102).

Harassees are often instructed by organizations and researchers to tell a superior, keep records, or write the harasser a letter (Paludi & Barickman, 1991; Petrocelli & Repa, 1999). However, these scenarios can often be problematic and lead to even more complications. Faculty and staff ethics violations (including harassment) get glossed over or ignored in comparison to other university issues, such as student cheating, and there is more acceptance of faculty harassment (Hicken, 2007). This is because sexual harassment incidents can be understood as

"conserving moves on the part of those with the greatest personal investment in keeping the dominant patriarchal order intact by curtailing the possible subject-positions that women as academic professionals can occupy" (Strine, 1992, p. 395). Relatedly, Dziech & Weiner (1990) reflect on the precarious position women faculty occupy because of their dependence on men for reappointment, tenure, and support in the university, and how this influences their effectiveness at helping students with a harassment problem. "The woman professor risks the most if she assists…. [She] depends on men for her continued survival in the institution, the same men she would have to confront about sexual harassment" (p. 148). Such confrontations will highlight the woman professor's gender and may lead to her becoming a target of sexual harassment herself. Or she may lose the privileged "honorary male" status that she depends on to be taken seriously by her male colleagues. Additionally, she runs the risk of being labeled a troublemaker, being punished for not properly assimilating into the departmental culture, and losing colleagues she believed to be friends and allies.

Two stories illustrate how formal reports of harassment often make situations worse and demonstrate a lack of transparency and accountability in the university setting. Frances Conley, a neurosurgeon, reported sexual harassment and sexist behavior by a colleague at Stanford University. The colleague was subsequently promoted. Francis was the only female full professor of neurosurgery and resigned because of the silence and inaction by the medical school dean, though the media responded immediately. "Six years after her protest, [she said] the atmosphere in her department remained 'fairly hostile' and the situation for women in the academy was still problematic" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, p. 114). The story of Jean Jew, a Chinese-American anatomy professor shares similarities. A colleague started "malicious rumors that she was having a sexual relationship with the male department chair. . . In response to her complaint,

the university tried to discredit her" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, p. 115). She won her case after 10 years, got retroactive promotion to full professor, back pay and compensation. However, her university did not grant her request for a transfer to another department or punish the offending professor. University officials protect the harasser as a way to shield the university's reputation, and regardless of job title or job description, officials have little concern with helping the victim (Clair, 1993; Namie & Namie, 2000). Victims become expendable, while universities wait for the tenured harasser to retire.

Reactions to Standpoints

"The *activities* of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them." (Harding, 1993, p. 54, emphasis in original).

Hello Kitty is threatening not just because she is an outsider, and not just because she "rocks the boat" by demanding a harassment-free workplace. She is threatening because she represents certain political assumptions about what counts as knowledge and how that relates to privilege. Standpoint theory recognizes that knowledge takes place in particular contexts; knowledge and accounts of knowledge are neither neutral nor universal. Yet the theorizing and experiences of some groups have not counted as knowledge in Western culture (Harding, 1990). As with Hello Kitty, experiences differ significantly depending on one's relation to privilege. The understandings of those not situated as the recipients of race, gender or other privilege will differ in systematic ways from those with privilege. Drawing on their own experiences and theorizing, groups outside the mainstream work towards self-valuation and self-determination (Collins, 2000). Meanwhile, what is assumed to be a neutral perspective is often the standpoint of dominant groups.

Standpoint epistemology is useful because it encourages us to denaturalize positions—that of the harasser and his university apologists— often seen as neutral and therefore apolitical. This allows us to see such privileged positions as existing among many others. For privileged groups, giving up the idea of knowledge as neutral is threatening, especially when such knowledge benefits them politically. As in Hello Kitty's case there can be a "backlash" against non-dominant standpoints. We illustrate how this happens through linguistically framing Hello Kitty as a problem, through positioning the harasser as the victim, and through trying to silence harassees' stories and sensemaking.

Hello Kitty's story works to uncover and critique the protection of harassers by the university system. This protection can be seen in responses to harassment that reject the idea of standpoints and "address a generic, genderless subject, stable in time and space" (Townsley & Geist, 2000, p. 213). Such protection is also evident in the language used (and not used) to describe harasser and harassee. For example, Hello Kitty is called postmodern, feminist, "cat," and emotional in ways that frame this as dirty and shameful, as not indicative of serious scholars, in ways oppositional to the real work of the university. She is feminized, and her standpoint is rejected. She is trivialized and denigrated because of her gender and outsider status and this makes it more difficult to fight the harassment which is already naturalized and "normal" in the setting. The frequency of harassing behaviors also helps to prevent their labeling as problematic because it further normalizes these behaviors in the university (Shepela & Levesque, 1998).

Second, the perpetuation and normalization of harassment can be seen in attempts to position the harasser as the actual victim. This fits with a broader white-male-as-victim discourse (of course, we recognize that all sexual harassers are not white males) that argues white males are no more privileged than other groups, and that they are in need of protection because of

injuries caused by their recent visibility *as* white males (Robinson, 2000). As white women and women and men of color contest white male privilege, white males see themselves as losing rightful entitlements available to them because they previously represented the universal and the "norm" (Grimes, 2007). Relatedly, harassers may announce their tangential membership in a suddenly relevant marginalized group as a way to ignore power differences and to trivialize the pressure others experience to assimilate or accommodate to the dominant academic system. Orbe (2006) discusses a similar dilemma for conversants as they articulate important cultural markers in interaction; what happens when all parties perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage and claim and operate from a non-dominant status? We also note that status quos are not challenged when "the focus on 'victims' makes it possible for white men to claim injury without claiming to be oppressed systematically by white supremacist patriarchy" (Robinson, 2000, p. 68).

As women in the academy challenge sexual harassment and abuse, they are met by some white males loudly protesting their supposed silencing and invisibility (Robinson, 2000). In academic "culture wars," Robinson (2000, p. 61) remarks upon "the depth of the *entitlement* that enables these wounded white male professors to be so appalled that anyone would question their motives and innocence, their disinterestedness and objectivity" (emphasis in original). While white male perspectives are re-centered through this victim discourse, what happens to the voices of victims of harassment? Writing about the disempowerment of these voices, Patton (2004a) argues "It is not enough to have the disenfranchised included in such a way as to make their contributions, their voices, and their perspectives ineffective and silenced because of the maintenance of hegemony or allow them to border-cross when it benefits those in the center" (p. 199). This can make it difficult for untenured faculty to use assertive tactics (Bingham, 1991; Kroløkke, 1998). In writing this essay we contribute to a feminist critique that necessarily calls

us to recognize long-standing patterns and possibilities for change. Through the practice of naming we hope to begin to disrupt harassing behaviors and the systems that condone and permit them by highlighting that they are not in fact natural or commonsensical. Kramerae (1992) argues, “As with other feminist critiques of men’s repression and hostility, much of the explanations involve telling stories until an adequate, shared vocabulary is available. . . long stories are often needed, since the meaning of one remark is often dependent on a history of events” (p. 105). Heeding Kramerae’s words, in this project we have begun to locate specific narratives and posited the ways they are connected to larger historical patterns of patriarchal domination.

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