Professor Abigail Saguy
102 Haines Hall
Saguy@soc.ucla.edu
(310) 794-4979
Office hours: Email for appointment via Zoom, same link as class website.

COURSE STATEMENT

This class surveys what sociological research can teach us about gender, power, and harassment in the #MeToo era. This inquiry assumes that there is a thing called sexual harassment and that we know what it is. And yet, how we define sexual harassment is itself a topic of heated debate. The concept of sexual harassment is a relatively recent one. Feminist activists first coined the term in the late 1970s. It was not until 1986 that the U.S. Supreme Court had its first sexual harassment ruling—Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57 (1986)—and not until Clarence Thomas’s confirmation hearings that most Americans first heard the term. As we will learn in week 1, the way we—meaning both the public and specifically social scientists—conceptualize sexual harassment has been deeply shaped by Catharine MacKinnon’s legal formulation and U.S. case law.

These original legal conceptions shapes the questions sociologists ask about sexual harassment and what they study. Legal scholars like MacKinnon and U.S. case law have defined sexual harassment primarily as a form of sex discrimination in employment and secondarily in education, under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, respectively. In contrast, case law is more limited in other areas such as housing and virtually nonexistent in others, such as public space. Likewise, most sociological research on sexual harassment focuses on the workplace and, secondarily, on education. It asks not only about the personal costs of sexual harassment but also how sexual harassment negatively affects women’s employment opportunities.

In this class, we will reflect not only on the existing literature but also on its silences. We will read and discuss work that critiques how U.S. law focuses on sexual forms of gender discrimination at the expense of non-sexual forms. Yet, because this bias is “baked into” much of the sociological research on sexual harassment, we will also end up reading a lot of work that reproduces this same bias. The course readings also focus on behaviors that would mostly correspond to U.S. definitions of sexual harassment and not on other forms of sexual violence. Finally, while we will read some national comparative work, the class content is overwhelmingly focused on the United States. Throughout the class, I hope you can identify both the strengths and blind spots of the various works we read, while also reflecting on where more research is needed.
LEARNING PHILOSOPHY AND THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

As with any seminar, this class will be a collective effort. Either we all win and advance together or none of us do. We all have things we can learn from others in the class, and we all have things we can teach others. I hope that this class will be a space in which we will all take intellectual risks and build knowledge together. When we take risks, we make mistakes. In fact, we cannot learn without making mistakes. To paraphrase my friend and colleague Karida Brown, I hope we can develop the type of pedagogical solidarity that allows us to do the hard work of being brave enough to learn and make mistakes, misunderstand, and grow as a learning community.

While in other spaces, it is not your job to teach others, in this space it is. By enrolling in this class, you are agreeing to try to make yourself understood to everyone in the class. We are all coming in with different levels of expertise and different sensitivities and blind spots. Yet, we are all human and, as such, want some of the same things: respect, dignity, and to be seen and heard. At this time of fear and uncertainty, let us try to practice kindness in this class.

This should go without saying, but past experience has taught me that it does not: Just because I assign a reading, does not mean I uncritically endorse it. Rather, I have selected works that have been influential or are representative of an important line of inquiry. In many cases, I have chosen articles that are engaged in some sort of debate or disagreement. The point is not to take sides or argue about which position is “right.” Rather, I want you to understand the logic of different positions, the assumptions on which they are based, as well as what they may leave out. In your writing and in class discussion, please try not to personalize your critiques by ascribing intent to individual authors. Instead, focus on the logic of the arguments themselves and—when relevant—the data and methods used to support those arguments. Please keep in mind that, since this is a new class, there are some pieces that I have not yet read closely and which we will be discovering together.

EVALUATION

• I expect you to attend regularly (via Zoom), participate in discussion, and complete weekly assignments.

• Each week, you are expected to post a memo—responding to the weekly questions on the syllabus—by noon on the Tuesday before class. I have created a shared Google drive for this purpose and subfolders for each week’s memos. Please include your name in the title of your memo. If you are having difficulty with these deadlines, please contact me.

• I will base your grade on the following:
  • Weekly memos (due on the Tuesday before seminar at noon): 50%
    o Each week, I will ask you to answer a series of questions about the class readings in a memo that you will post to a shared Google drive. I will grade based on completion. If you answer all questions to the best of your ability, you will get full credit. I may insert comments in your memo as I read it. If you want more feedback about how you can make your writing or analysis more compelling, please let me know and I will try to oblige. :)
  • Class participation: 50% (I will drop the lowest score)
If you are present on the Zoom call and participate, you will get full points. I plan to break the class into three sections of 45 minutes each. We will use the weekly questions to organize our discussion. My plan is to “go around the room” and have everyone respond to the questions to be sure that everyone gets an opportunity to participate. We will modify as needed based on how this goes.

- This seminar depends on your participation for its success. The more you put into it, the more you (and your classmates) will get out of it. So please come ready to participate! This is the first time I am leading a seminar via Zoom. Please be patient with each other and me as we learn this technology together.

REQUIRED READING
Other readings will be posted to the class website

SCHEDULE
Remember, complete reading and homework by noon on the Tuesday before class!

Week 1: April 2, 2020
Legal Foundations
Required Reading:
Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)
Post a memo (to shared Google drive) of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing the following: How does Catharine MacKinnon conceptualize the harm of sexual harassment? The legal remedy? How do the EEOC guidelines and Meritor decision reflect MacKinnon’s perspective? What, if anything, do you think MacKinnon (and by extension the EEOC and Meritor) leaves out?

Week 2: April 9, 2020
What Is Harassment? Who Harasses, Who Gets Harassed, and What Are the Economic and Career Effects?
Required Reading:


Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)
Post a memo (to shared Google drive) of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing the following: How does Catharine MacKinnon’s Sexual Harassment of Working Women inform the readings for this week? What is the central argument of each article and what evidence does each article offer to support its argument? How does the piece by Roscigno challenge arguments made by the other papers?
Additional recommended reading:

Week 3: April 16, 2020
Legal Debates over Sexual Harassment
Required Reading:
Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)
Post a memo of 1-2 pages single-spaced (to shared Google drive) addressing the central arguments made by each of the authors and the evidence they use to support their arguments. Also address how the papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course.
Additional recommended reading:

Week 4: April 23, 2020
How Do People Understand Sexual Harassment?
Required Reading:


**Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)**

Post a memo of 1-2 pages single-spaced (to shared Google drive) addressing the central arguments made by each of the authors and the evidence they use to support their arguments. Also address how the papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course.

**Additional recommended reading:**

Blackstone, Amy, Jason Houle, and Christopher Uggen. “‘I didn't recognize it as a bad experience until I was much older’: Age, experience, and workers’ perceptions of sexual harassment.” *Sociological Spectrum* 34.4 (2014): 314-337.


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**Week 5: April 30, 2020**

**Responses to Sexual Harassment**

**Required Reading:**


**Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)**

Post a memo of 1-2 pages single-spaced (to shared Google drive) addressing the central arguments made by each of the authors and the evidence they use to support their arguments. Discuss what each paper has to say about how racial inequality shapes experiences of and responses to sexual harassment. Also address how the papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course.

**Additional recommended reading:**


Week 6: May 7, 2020

Cultural Context and Sexual harassment


Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)

Post a memo of 1-2 pages single-spaced (to shared Google drive) addressing the central arguments made by each of the authors and the evidence they use to support their arguments. Also address how the papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course.

Week 7: May 14, 2020

How National Context Shapes Legal Approaches

Required Reading:


Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)

Post a memo (to shared Google drive) of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing the following: What does Saguy (2003) argue about how and why has sexual harassment been defined very differently in U.S. and French law? How do those different legal definitions shape employer responses in the two nations? How do they shape how ordinary people understand sexual harassment? What Saguy (2018) argue about the effect of the 2002 European Union recommendations on French law?

Additional recommended reading:


Week 8: May 21, 2020

Sexual Harassment Beyond Typical Workplaces

Required Reading:


**Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)**

The readings for this week concern behavior that would likely not be covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or Title IX of the Education Amendments Act because it does not occur in either a workplace with 15 or more employees or in an educational institution. Post a memo (to shared Google drive) of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing the following: How does this legal context shape how the authors label the behavior? How the people in their study label and understand it? What are the central arguments of each article and what evidence do they use to support them? How do these papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course?

**Week 9: May 28, 2020**

**Corporate Responses and Remedies**

**Required Reading:**


**Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)**

Post a memo (to shared Google drive) of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing the central arguments made by each of the authors and the evidence they use to support their arguments. Also address how the papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course.

**Additional recommended reading:**


**Week 10: June 4, 2020**

**What to Do?**

*Required Reading:*


Dobbin, Frank & Alexandra Kalev. 2017. “Training programs and reporting systems won’t end sexual harassment. promoting more women will.” *Harvard Business Review.* November 15. [https://tinyurl.com/y8me883o](https://tinyurl.com/y8me883o)


*Homework (due Tuesday before class at noon)*

Post a memo (to shared Google drive) of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing the central arguments made by each of the authors and the evidence they use to support their arguments. Also address how the papers speak to each other and to readings we have had earlier in the course.

*Additional recommended reading:*


**Finals Week**

*Homework (due Tuesday of finals week at noon)*

Post a memo of 1-2 pages single-spaced addressing what you found to be the most exciting work reviewed over the quarter and how you or others could build upon that work. Identify one or two avenues of future research that you think should be pursued.