2018 GSA Presidential Address: Navigating "Me, too" in the Geosciences

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We have seen the "Me, too!" movement expand across all aspects of humankind. From Hollywood, where it grew legs, to Congress, state legislatures, the White House, huge corporations, small businesses, sports, television personalities, the military, the Olympics, religions, and, yes, to GSA.

Before Harvey Weinstein—before something hit the proverbial fan—GSA was already receiving and addressing complaints from members who experienced harassment (ranging from bullying to sexual assault, but most commonly, gender harassment). We launched a review of our ethics position, our obligations, and our Code of Conduct to ensure our Society has the means to effectively deal with unprofessional behavior at GSA meetings, field trips, and other sponsored events. GSA recognized the absence of good definitions and effective procedures and made moves to correct that. GSA's initiative was timely and good strides have been made. We are taking "proactive measures."

I believe people in the geosciences have excellent skills to address harassment, prejudice, and gender issues. ***We have*** the scientific skills and intellect to address many societal problems and we are good at using these skills. We routinely gather data, review published studies, and conduct in-depth conversations with experts. This is second nature to the professional geoscientist.

What is not second nature to us is how to employ these skills in our *interpersonal relationships*, including our interactions with colleagues, staff, students, and even our families. And this can make a big difference.

So, first, let's look at facts. The Facts. Data. The scientist's friend and staple for sound analysis.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published in the summer of 2018 a report, "Sexual harassment of women: Climate, culture, and consequences." Though mostly about women, because they are the target of most harassment, it includes substantial data on men, too.

Incredibly, studies on sexual harassment from the 1980s through today continue to show that sexual harassment of women is widespread in workplaces and that **the rates of sexual harassment have not significantly decreased.** This is a disturbing finding.

Let's look first at how sexual harassment was defined in the National Academies study: Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that consists of three types of behavior:

"1. 'Gender harassment' means using verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility, objectification, exclusion, or second-class status. The use of derogatory terms, inappropriate jokes, pictures, etc.;

"2.'Unwanted sexual attention,' including unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances; and

"3.'Sexual coercion'…favorable professional treatment is conditioned on sexual activity."

Most people may think of sexual harassment as just unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion—however, this study defines gender harassment (the use of verbal and nonverbal behaviors) as a form of sexual harassment, and it is the most common form. Sexual harassment can be either direct (targeting an individual) or ambient (generalized over a larger group or population). Both are harmful and create a hostile environment.

The National Academies study referred to a University of Texas System ARC3 Campus Climate Survey (Swartout, 2018) that found that 17% of science students (including geosciences) experience sexist hostility. Surprisingly, it was found that 13% of the male science students experience sexual harassment, compared to 17% of the women. AND, populations with multiple marginalities (female, people of color, and gender nonconformist minorities) experience a greater rate of harassment. Corroborating the Texas study, a Pennsylvania State University System study completed in 2015 found that 30%–40% of all science students (not just geoscience) experience sexist hostility from faculty/staff. The variation in percent depends on the campus and the discipline. In the sciences (excluding engineering and medical), 12%–18% experience crude behavior and 4%–5% unwanted sexual attention. Sexual coercion is, fortunately, low, at ~1%. It is little comfort to read that 50% of medical students have experienced sexist hostility. In fact, across the board, medical student stats were terrible, including a large percentage of male students who experienced harassment.

Top-down harassment has the most harmful impact, and, fortunately, it is much less frequent in the sciences than peer harassment—80% of reported harassment is by peers. But, again, all reports of harassment are exacerbated when involving a person of color or gender diversity.

The largest contributor to sexual harassment is organizational environment. **This puts the geosciences in jeopardy because geoscience inherently has many of these organizational hazards.** These are:

1. Institutions where men outnumber women;
2. Where there is an absence of organizational sanctions—meaning complaints not taken seriously;
3. Where leadership provides a model for inappropriate behavior; and
4. Where there are large power differentials.

 https://doi.org/10.1130/GSAT18PrsAdr.1.

There are, however, some easy solutions to propagating LOW rates of sexual harassment:

1. *Establish a zero-tolerance climate;*
2. *Develop a staff that is less male-dominated, with a larger expression of female leadership.*

Many geoscientists think, "Oh, we covered this a long time ago." "We have lots of women on our staff, therefore we are finished with this." This cannot be "assumed." This is a question that needs to be regularly revisited. Gather fresh data. Reevaluate. And, importantly, use valid methodologies established by social science research. We, as scientists, know that when working on a geoscience problem, valid methodologies are crucial. This is equally true for data-gathering regarding harassment and institutional environments.

One important aspect of our regular evaluations is to recognize and confront our biases. Most of us think that we do not have a bias, but when we do the actual research, we find we do harbor unconscious biases. Both men and women.

Jackson Katz, a football star turned women's studies student and author of the *Macho Paradox* (2006), likes to get data from his classes. He says, "I draw a line down the middle of a chalkboard, sketching a male symbol on one side and a female symbol on the other. Then I ask just the men: What steps do you guys take, on a daily basis, to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted? At first there is a kind of awkward silence as the men try to figure out if they've been asked a trick question. The silence gives way to a smattering of nervous laughter. Occasionally, a young guy will raise his hand and say, 'I stay out of prison.' This is typically followed by another moment of laughter, before someone finally raises his hand and soberly states, 'Nothing. I don't think about it.' Then I ask women the same question. What steps do you take on a daily basis to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted? Women throughout the audience immediately start raising their hands. As the men sit in stunned silence, the women recount safety precautions they take as part of their daily routine. Here are some of their answers: Hold my keys as a potential weapon. Look in the back seat of the car before getting in. Carry a cell phone. Don't go jogging at night. Lock all the windows when I sleep, even on hot summer nights. Be careful not to drink too much. Don't put my drink down and come back to it; make sure I see it being poured. Own a big dog. Carry mace or pepper spray. Have an unlisted phone number. Have a man's voice on my answering machine. Park in well-lit areas. Don't use parking garages. Don't get on elevators with only one man, or with a group of men. Vary my route home from work. Watch what I wear. Don't use highway rest areas. Use a home alarm system. Don't wear headphones when jogging. Avoid forests or wooded areas, even in the daytime. Don't take a first-floor apartment. Go out in groups. Own a firearm. Meet men on first dates in public places. Make sure to have a car or cab fare. Don't make eye contact with men on the street. Make assertive eye contact with men on the street." Creating awareness in men of what women face each day helps to build empathy and helps men put aside their personal bias.

So, just as in a geoscience investigation, don't ASSUME. Survey your employees, faculties, students: Get the data. Refresh the data.

Another question that always enters into this discussion: "Why don't women report? We aren't wimps, for god's sake!"

Characteristically, women have learned to go along to get along. They are much more likely to try to ignore or even try to appease the harasser. They are non-confrontational. Women often mentally diminish the experience—saying to themselves that it wasn't all that serious. They choose not to attract negative attention; they don't want to *get the aggressor in trouble or are afraid of retaliation*. Only ~25% report incidents. Or worse. In the University of Texas study, only 2% were found to report. Women of color report even less than whites. Fear of blame, disbelief, inaction, retaliation, humiliation, ostracism, and damage to career and reputation reign. These reactions affect women's careers—where they might leave a leadership track to avoid a perpetrator, or, leave the institution, or, even leaving their career. Getting labeled a complainer is feared the most and harms or ends careers.

Older generations—my generation, generations before me—basically "lived with" abuse problems, developed defenses, succumbed, shut up, deferred, and tolerated. It was just the way it was. We definitely ignored or appeased. The risk for negatively impacting our careers was too high to "stick our necks out."

Probably some of you remember going to geologic conventions where there were two registration lines labeled "Geologists" and "Ladies."

And, we sat in on sessions where photos of scantily clad women were used jokingly for "scale" or to make some point. The audience would giggle or laugh or even applaud, whether comfortable or not. Many men were not comfortable, lots of women (of course, there were NOT lots of women) were uncomfortable. But our reaction was governed by our need to fit in, to be accepted, and being "one of the boys," and accepting "boys will be boys" overruled our sensitivity. Our convention floors were populated with sexy, scantily clad women showing off the latest in drill bits or geochemical measuring tools. Those days are well behind us, it appears. But the changes in our meeting environment have still not eliminated sexual harassment.

I recall a couple of my own experiences and reactions. Twice at different times, male candidates for president of a large international geological association were inappropriate with me. One would not keep his hands off me in a darkened meeting room. Then he followed me to my room that night and tried to force his way in. Did I show outrage and anger? Not at all. My first reaction was to worry about HIS feelings as I said no, over and over. I was trying not to hurt his feelings! It never occurred to me to put myself first. I tried to be polite, to be gentle. It could have sent a message of weakness to him. Therefore, I *understand* that the act of saying no, expressing outrage, or reporting is indeed complex.

Knowing that young men, even today, can be the subject of harassment makes me more chagrined to recall 40 years ago when I let my frustration about being asked inappropriate questions with job interviews get the best of me. I had recently had an interview with the president of a small oil company where he asked, "I see that you are divorced. If you remarry, do you plan to quit?" Never mind that he, too, was divorced at that time. I just smiled and answered, "No, of course not." But I found it upsetting. So, my frustration got the best of me later in the week when a young man that I had employed to do summer fieldwork appeared at my office door. Two weeks prior,

I had sent him off to the San Juan Basin with a company car, expense account, and instructions for acquiring samples and measuring sections. I asked what he was doing back in Denver so soon and he replied that he had gotten married in May and his new bride did not want him gone all summer. Without batting an eye, I said, "Well, that's why we don't like to hire young men. They just get married and quit!" Oh, wherever you are today, young man, I apologize.

How I admired a Houston woman, Deborah Sacrey, who told me about going up to a rig floor to start her duties as a well-site geologist in the 1970s. She was greeted by an imposing roughneck who told her that there were only two kinds of women who came to rigs. Wives or women who provide "other" services. She handed him her business card and said, "Well, here is a third kind of woman you can expect on a rig—the kind that will fire your sorry ass if you give her any crap!" Oh, my! Where does that deep self-confidence come from? Can we learn it? Can we teach it?

Another female geologist I know fought hard to be able to do her share of well-site work in the jungles of Central America. When she was brutally raped by a gang of armed locals, she hid the fact from the well-site team (explaining her bruises and wounds as resulting from falling down the rig stairs) and did not tell anyone because she was afraid that (A) they would not believe her, and (B) very important—she feared she would ruin the opportunity for other women in the company to do well-site work.

Two years ago, a GSA initiative was developed to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for meeting participants: RISE = Respectful Inclusive Scientific Events. This promotes "mindfulness"—being aware of your own behavior and the behavior of others to promote the best of experiences for participants, including "bystander intervention training." Other societies have used GSA's model for their own meetings.

Many of our fellow geologists have written to GSA leadership with irritation, "Aren't we beyond this!" No. We are not. Get the data.

Last year, 2017, was full of news events about transgressions—but 2018 is seeing mixed repercussions and some backsliding.

Only about half of the states in the U.S. have followed through with promised bills and training for legislators and staffs, according to Associated Press News (Lieb, 2018).

The "Congressional Accountability and Harassment Reform Act: S. 2872" passed the Senate but has not yet passed in the House. And it does not look optimistic for passing. A big issue is lawmakers' *objection to holding themselves personally responsible* for paying any settlement—they are accessing taxpayers' money out of a little-known account in the U.S. Treasury or they're using the Office of Compliance to pay. It has paid out more than US$17 million over the past 20 years handling workplace complaints and settlements. This is not made public.

But we can't fix the problems of the world today, or this year, but we can address the problem in the geoscience world. Let's bring this home to GSA again.

Besides establishing our RISE program—two more recent GSA initiatives:

Under the leadership of Monica Gowan, GSA developed a new position paper, approved in May: "Removing Barriers to Career Progression for Women in the Geosciences."

This position statement:

1. **Affirms the pressing need** for a change in professional culture so that all people are welcomed, supported, and can thrive in the geoscience profession; and for policies that aspire to the highest standards of conduct as a professional society;
2. **Advocates for** resolving implicit and explicit biases and the elimination of harassment, including bullying and sexual misconduct in the workplace; and
3. **Recommends** elevated personal and professional responsibility and evidence-based policies that extend beyond civil and legal remedies, to promote inclusive, safe, and productive environments in the geoscience classroom, office, laboratory, and field.

GSA, under the leadership of immediate past president, Isabel Montañez, set up an ad hoc committee to review and make recommendations for GSA's Code of Ethics. Neil Fishman chaired the committee, and recommendations were presented to Council in May 2018. These included:

1. Add enforcement to our code of conduct;
2. Create a standing committee for ethics;
3. Accept no statute of limitations for a breach of the GSA code;
4. Provide training for leadership and staff; and
5. GSA engage a "compliance officer" with a large emphasis on proactive efforts.

In the geoscientist's world, opportunities are abundant in our world for misbehavior, whether it is as a victim or as a person accused. We are often in isolated settings. "In the field," "traveling," "office hours," "beer parties," "late nights in the lab," "conventions." Those are the real circumstances of our lives that other professionals might not have to navigate.

And these are parts of our professional life that we want to keep. These are activities and situations we love and value. They are important relationship- and career-building activities. Fieldwork. Having a beer together. Being mentored by a prominent geoscientist. These things help make geoscience fun, exciting, and rewarding. It is what makes a geoscience career unique and collegial. We cherish these aspects of our student and professional life. How do we keep these priceless interactions in the "Me, too" world? How do we navigate our unique and potentially dangerous landscape?

I believe those of us in the geosciences have excellent skills to address harassment, just as we address a geologic problem. We get the data, study the data, and then promote sensitivity and sensibility.

We are capable. We can do this.

We will navigate from "Me, too" to "Not Us!"

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