

# Sexual Harassment and Violence in the Practice of Anthropology

## Creating Safe Conversational Spaces for CASCA Members

CASCA Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group, Marieka Sax, Marie Michèle Grenon, María Cristina Manzano-Munguía and Tara Joly

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Article abstract

The Canadian Anthropology Society is working to address sexual harassment and violence at institutional and community-based settings where anthropologists undertake their work. In 2021, the newly formed Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group held a roundtable at the CASCA conference to start a conversation about sexual violence among CASCA members and to workshop best practices to prevent, disrupt, and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and violence that CASCA members may experience or observe. Here, the Working Group summarizes the process of planning, implementing, and following up the roundtable, focusing on specific actions taken by the organizers to ensure a safe conversational space before, during, and after the event. We demonstrate how the roundtable aligns within the larger framework of CASCA's institutional history and future. The goal of this report is to provide a framework for convening difficult conversations in professional settings, especially in an online environment. We provide recommendations to this end, and emphasize the need to hold further conversations to combat the air of silence that remains, even in a post-#MeToo world, surrounding sexual violence in anthropology.

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# Sexual Harassment and Violence in the Practice of Anthropology

## Creating Safe Conversational Spaces for CASCA Members

CASCA Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group<sup>1</sup>

Marieka Sax  
*University of Northern  
British Columbia*

Marie Michèle Grenon  
*Université Laval*

María Cristina Manzano-Munguía  
*Benemérita Universidad Autónoma  
de Puebla*

Tara Joly  
*University of Northern British Columbia*

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**Abstract:** The Canadian Anthropology Society is working to address sexual harassment and violence at institutional and community-based settings where anthropologists undertake their work. In 2021, the newly formed Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group held a roundtable at the CASCA conference to start a conversation about sexual violence among CASCA members and to workshop best practices to prevent, disrupt, and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and violence that CASCA members may experience or observe. Here, the Working Group summarizes the process of planning, implementing, and following up the roundtable, focusing on specific actions taken by the organizers to ensure a safe conversational space before, during, and after the event. We demonstrate how the roundtable aligns within the larger framework of CASCA's institutional history and future. The goal of this report is to provide a framework for convening difficult conversations in professional settings, especially in an online environment. We provide recommendations to this end, and emphasize the need to hold further conversations to combat the air of silence that remains, even in a post-#MeToo world, surrounding sexual violence in anthropology.

**Keywords:** anthropology; #metoo; researcher safety; sexual harassment; sexual violence

**Résumé :** La Société canadienne d'anthropologie s'efforce de lutter contre le harcèlement sexuel et la violence dans les milieux institutionnels et communautaires où les anthropologues mènent leurs travaux. En 2021, le nouveau groupe de travail sur le harcèlement sexuel et la violence a organisé une table-ronde lors du congrès de la CASCA pour engager une discussion sur la violence sexuelle parmi les membres de la CASCA et élaborer des pratiques exemplaires pour prévenir, interrompre et répondre aux incidents de harcèlement sexuel et de violence que les membres de la CASCA peuvent vivre ou observer. Le groupe de travail résume ici le processus de planification, de mise en œuvre et de suivi de la table-ronde, en se concentrant sur les mesures spécifiques prises par les organisateurs pour garantir un espace de conversation sûr avant, pendant et après l'évènement. Nous démontrons comment la table-ronde s'inscrit dans un cadre plus large de l'histoire institutionnelle de la CASCA et de son avenir. L'objectif de ce rapport vise à fournir un cadre pour permettre des conversations difficiles dans des contextes professionnels, en particulier dans un environnement en ligne. À cette fin, nous fournissons des recommandations et soulignons la nécessité de tenir d'autres conversations pour combattre le silence qui persiste, y compris dans un monde post#MeToo, autour de la violence sexuelle en anthropologie.

**Mots-clés :** anthropologie ; #metoo ; sécurité des chercheurs ; harcèlement sexuel ; violence sexuelle

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## Introduction

The #MeToo movement rose to prominence in 2017, galvanizing people around the world to voice their experiences of sexual assault and harassment. While sometimes criticized for ignoring the heightened vulnerabilities of non-white women and LGBTQIA folx (Ison 2019; Onwuachi-Willig 2018), the widespread use of the #MeToo hashtag on social media rendered visible and undeniable the systemic aggression and violence that countless individuals are subjected to as a result of their sex, sexual preferences, and gender identities. The movement provided a platform for survivors to share their stories, support one another, and demand accountability for incidents that are, more often than not, unreported and unprosecuted. #MeToo opened up conversational space in organizations, institutions, and wider society, and created a watershed moment for changes in regulations, policies, and procedures (Canadian Women's Foundation n.d.).

Responding to these changes brought by the #MeToo movement, the Canadian Anthropology Society (CASCA) is working to address sexual harassment and violence in institutional and community-based settings where anthropologists undertake their work. In this report, we provide a brief overview of what CASCA has done to date, and discuss the two-part roundtable we organized for the 2021 CASCA conference. We present a model for how to create and hold space to discuss sexual harassment and violence in organizations, institutions, associations, and classrooms. We end by outlining the next steps the Working Group is taking to develop resources and supports for CASCA members.

### **Overview of CASCA's Work on Sexual Harassment and Violence**

In Fall 2018, then Members-at-Large published an issue of the *Culture* newsletter on the theme of #MeToo (Vol. 12, No. 2 – “#metoo” 2018). CASCA released a Statement on Harassment in July 2019, motivated by ongoing conversations within the CASCA Executive Committee and broader reflections within the anthropological community (CASCA 2019).

The Executive Committee then implemented an online survey to gather information about members' experiences of and concerns regarding sexual harassment. The survey ran from 1 August to 31 October, 2019, with invitations sent through the CASCA listserv, the CASCA Facebook page, and the *Culture* newsletter. One hundred and fifty-six CASCA members participated in the survey, representing 13.6 percent of total membership at the time. The Members-at-Large presented the survey findings at the 2019 CASCA AGM, and wrote an analytical report posted on CASCA's website (Sax and Grenon 2020).

These initial actions informed a learning exchange between the CASCA Executive and organizers with the American Anthropological Association (AAA) at the joint conference in November 2019. The AAA has been developing policies and resources for prevention, intervention, and response to sexual harassment for the past decade. The CASCA Members-at-Large drew upon the AAA's insights in developing the recommendations that came out of the 2019 survey.

The purpose of the survey was to learn if CASCA members have been impacted by sexual harassment in the contexts of their professional work—specifically, in university/postsecondary institutions, while conducting research, and at CASCA-sponsored events—and if there are gaps in prevention, response,

and support that CASCA could address. The majority of respondents reported that they have been impacted by sexual harassment in some way during their work, whether as a student, faculty member, researcher, or in another role. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that resources for prevention, response, and support are unavailable and inadequate in the three professional contexts covered by the survey.

Sexual harassment impacted 62.3 percent of respondents to some degree in their university/postsecondary institution, 50.0 percent of respondents while conducting research, and 9.6 percent of respondents in the context of CASCA-sponsored events such as the annual conference. Over a third of respondents (32.1 percent) reported experiencing sexual harassment in their university/postsecondary institution. Over a third of respondents (35.9 percent) reported experiencing sexual harassment in research. Very few respondents (2.3 percent) reported experiencing sexual harassment at CASCA-sponsored events, but nevertheless some incidents have occurred.

Overall, the survey indicated that CASCA needs to do more for sexual harassment prevention, response, and support in the professional contexts in which its members work. The survey report made the following recommendations:

- Develop and implement a clear, actionable, and publicly available policy on sexual harassment;
- Promote and publicize CASCA's Statement on Harassment and additional policies, procedures, and resources related to sexual harassment;
- Provide programming and services for sexual harassment prevention, response, and support at the annual conference;
- Develop education, training, and networking opportunities for CASCA members to gain the tools they need to navigate sexual harassment in professional settings; and
- Explore additional avenues for advocacy and support of CASCA members who are survivors of sexual harassment in professional settings.

CASCA formally adopted a Sexual Harassment Policy at the 2020 AGM (CASCA 2020). The CASCA Executive Committee also supported the formation of a Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group to address the other recommendations. After a call for participation through the CASCA listserv, we founded the Working Group in the Fall of 2020.

## The 2021 Sexual Harassment and Violence Roundtable

The first task we set for ourselves was to pick up the plans Marieka and Marie Michèle had made for the 2020 CASCA conference, cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We organized a two-part roundtable on sexual harassment and violence for the 2021 CASCA conference, hosted online at the University of Guelph. The purpose of the roundtable was twofold: to start a conversation about sexual harassment and violence in professional settings with CASCA members, and to workshop best practices to prevent, disrupt, and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and violence CASCA members may experience or observe.

We approached a wide range of subject-matter and practitioner experts in Canadian anthropology, and connected with other invitees through snowball referencing. Our discussants included, but were not limited to, people working in anthropology, archaeology, and gender studies; faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and PhD candidates; and women, men, queer folx, and First Nations community members. This diversity positively contributed to both the planning process and roundtable discussions.

The following people participated: Pamela Block (Western University); Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier (University of Victoria); Lena Gross (University of Tromsø, Norway); Nathan Hawthorne (Western University); Lisa Hodgetts (Western University); Susanne Kuehling (University of Regina); Mary-Lee Mulholland (Mount Royal University); Lindsay Ostridge (University of Ottawa), and Natalie Owl (University of Regina and First Nations community Member). Elder Mary-Lou Smoke (Western University) had to pull out before the conference due to scheduling conflicts.

The roundtable itself consisted of two 90-minute sessions. The first session provided an overview of some key issues regarding sexual harassment and violence in anthropology. Based on our planning meetings, discussants chose one of four questions and developed their responses. The second session responded to a series of hypothetical scenarios to generate strategies and best practices as a first step in developing more formalized guidelines for CASCA members. Our questions and scenarios, based on our group planning meetings, corresponded to situations across four professional sites in which sexual harassment and violence may occur: (a) workplaces and institutions, (b) field sites, (c) liminal spaces, and (d) marginalized spaces.<sup>2</sup>

**Workplaces and Institutions:** The 2019 CASCA Sexual Harassment Survey (Sax and Grenon 2020) found that over a third of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment in the university/postsecondary institution context. Among these respondents, it occurred most often three or more times, indicating that in this setting it is more often a serial problem than an isolated occurrence. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that resources provided by institutions for sexual harassment prevention, response, and support are unavailable and inadequate. Institutions have policies and guidelines for responding to sexual harassment, but navigating them is complicated and potentially re-traumatizing.

With this context in mind, we posed the following question to roundtable discussants in the first session: *Recognizing each institution is different, could you walk us through examples of reporting sexual harassment at your institution?*

We included a workplace scenario for discussion in the second session: *At a departmental meeting, a non-tenured junior faculty member makes a suggestion, and in response a senior faculty member belittles them by saying they don't know what they're talking about. The junior faculty member then becomes quiet and disengages from further conversation. Later, in the individual's performance review, a senior faculty member says the non-tenured junior faculty member is overly sensitive to criticism, which they attribute to the individual's gender. How can the junior faculty member respond to this situation?*

Discussants noted that systemic corruption, academic elitism, and a lack of clear policy and supports contribute to the prevalence of sexual violence and ongoing harm in this context. There is often a labyrinth of policies and paperwork that must be navigated in order to respond to sexual violence at universities. Junior faculty were noted to be at increased risk of exploitation. To address sexual violence on campus, practical potential responses were discussed, including the following: keep a file documenting experiences of harassment and violence; find an ally or a mentor within the institution who can support you; alert the supervisor of the perpetrator; and know your institution's policies.

**Field Sites and Field Schools:** The potential for sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence in the field is an often-unacknowledged issue facing students and researchers who work in the social sciences. The 2019 CASCA Sexual Harassment Survey found that over a third of respondents experienced sexual harassment in research settings, most often three or more times. There

are unique concerns and issues surrounding sexual harassment in the context of conducting research.

Accordingly, we posed this question to roundtable discussants in the first session: *What do you see as the main issues regarding sexual harassment and violence when conducting fieldwork and field schools, particularly in international settings?*

This was followed up in the second session with a fieldwork scenario: *A student carrying out fieldwork by themselves in another country has worked with a gatekeeper in the community on several occasions, always in the presence of other people. The student finds themselves in an isolated situation alone with this gatekeeper, who suggests that in order to accomplish the student's research, the student will have to have sex with them. Keeping in mind that we're not here to evaluate how someone got into a situation like this or to pass judgement on them, how can the student safely respond to this situation?*

Discussants explained that, often, violence in fieldwork is normalized in methods training or by academic supervisors as a “rite of passage” or just another field experience that can become “good data.” Ideals persist of the lone male/masculine ethnographer who can move safely and freely in the field. Isolation and lack of supports or contacts in the field may perpetuate sexual violence. Additionally, local behaviours, cultural norms, and laws that differ from the researcher's home setting pose a challenge for individuals who experience sexual violence in the field. Roundtable discussants noted that anthropologists need to have detailed conversations about violence before fieldwork. There is also a need for support structures within departments, especially for graduate students, such as an independent person (not a supervisor) with whom to debrief before and after fieldwork, or to whom researchers can report sexual violence.

***Liminal Spaces:*** There are many social interactions in between official or professional activities that are important to doing anthropology. These interactions may take place outside of conference or meeting venues, such as restaurants, bars, homes, and public spaces. Many things can happen before and after attending a conference session, while engaging community members, and when building relationships with colleagues and collaborators. While the CASCA 2019 Sexual Harassment Survey found that experiences of sexual harassment at CASCA-sponsored events are rare, they still do happen. Experiences of sexual harassment and violence in liminal spaces may be



additionally traumatizing or difficult to navigate, because such settings are “betwixt and between” institutional jurisdictions and everyday life.

In the first session, we asked roundtable discussants: *How do you see sexual harassment and violence as manifesting in these liminal spaces?*

We also included a liminal scenario for discussion in the second session: *A scholar is drinking with colleagues at a conference social. They’ve only had a few drinks but the scholar feels very tired, confused and weak. One of their colleagues offers to bring them back to their hotel room. The scholar wakes up the next day feeling wrong, but not remembering the night before. What can the scholar do to respond to this situation?*

Discussants identified that violence may be perpetuated in liminal spaces because defining boundaries can be more challenging outside of an institution. Drinking culture in the discipline also plays a role in putting anthropologists at risk in these spaces.

***Marginalized Spaces/Intersectionality:*** Marginalized people are more at risk for sexual harassment and violence. These populations may include Indigenous, racialized, trans and queer people, persons with a disability, and others. At the same time, people with perceived power may also experience sexual violence and systemic vulnerabilities. As well, sexual harassment and violence can be perpetrated by those perceived as having power as well as those lacking power.

With these intersectional considerations in mind, we asked roundtable discussants: *How are different populations at risk for sexual harassment and violence?*

Discussants in the second session addressed a related scenario: *An Indigenous researcher, who is a single parent, is being harassed by their Indigenous colleagues to return to their abusive partner who is related to a few of the same Indigenous colleagues. The colleagues make comments about the researcher’s sex life and lack of ability to get a partner. The researcher is afraid to say anything as they are not from the area and do not have any family there. The individual is afraid to lose their job. What can the Indigenous researcher do in response to this workplace harassment?*

The resulting discussion illuminated that stereotypes about “typical survivors” and manifestations of “violence” lead to a lack of conversation about sexual violence, including lack of reporting. Participants noted that we must move beyond our own mental images of a “survivor” and/or “perpetrator,” and remember that everyone is capable of both wielding power and feeling pain.

In Indigenous communities, as one discussant noted, lateral violence can be common; decolonization is an ongoing process. Sexual violence can occur across all types of power dynamics, including supervisors and mentors, peer-to-peer, and between fieldworkers and research participants.

Unfortunately, victim blaming persists across these spaces. For example, some anthropologists blame researchers who were unable to continue with their studies due to experiences of violence in any of the settings above. Senior scholars have a responsibility not to perpetuate these narratives, and those within academia must reach out to and maintain communication with those who have left university environments to disrupt this cycle of harm.

Across these four areas, discussants emphasized the importance of safety preparation. Anthropologists should have knowledge about what resources are available across all these spaces, and a basic understanding of the communities within each space. Barriers to reporting and healing may include not understanding definitions of and policy relating to sexual violence, as well as avoiding reprisal and further harm to all involved. Additionally, discussants noted the importance of finding an ally or mentor in each of the above spaces, such as others who are navigating similar bureaucratic processes like reporting, or a trusted community member in the field.

### **What We Learned from the Overall Process**

The 2021 roundtable achieved our objectives of raising awareness of CASCA's work on sexual harassment and violence; starting a safe and empowering conversation with CASCA members; and sharing strategies to prevent, disrupt, and respond to sexual harassment and violence in the institutional, research, and community settings in which members work.

We knew it would be important to clearly define the purpose, structure, and content on the roundtable, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for discussants (that is, assigning each to particular questions/scenarios) and organizers (moderator, technical coordinator, Q and A facilitator, and floating support). We also knew it would be important to build relationships with discussants in a collaborative planning process, and support invited discussants new to CASCA (for example, community practitioners and scholars in other allied disciplines).

Many more things were brought to our attention by discussants during the planning meetings. As a result, we developed procedures and guidelines for participant and discussant safety (for example, opening safety statement; one-on-one support protocols; group debriefing protocols). We prepared downloadable resources to share with participants (for example, a PDF of crisis and help lines, another PDF of education and training resources). We also offered a way for participants to anonymously submit questions or comments during the roundtable, which was used. While no participants accessed the one-on-one support we provided during the roundtable, we know that everyone was better off with access to these resources.

Although the Working Group brainstormed possible discussion questions and scenarios, blind spots remained. Input from discussants was vital to filling these gaps, while also responding to the discussants' specific areas of practice. The phrasing of the hypothetical scenarios was particularly sensitive. We used third person phrasing, removed potentially triggering details, and introduced each question/scenario with a brief context. Nevertheless, during the roundtable we found that sometimes the phrasing was too vague or too specific to direct the conversation towards our intended topic.

Other challenges were technical in nature. We knew the roundtable would be different because of the online format, and we tried to plan for this as much as possible. The online conference platform did not accommodate break-out rooms, and so less time was allocated to each scenario as the discussion had to take place in the same room. There was not a gallery view where all attendees could see one another, which constrained the creation of a shared space with audience members. Active audience participation could have been boosted if attendees could pre-register, but we were not able to arrange this.

In the absence of an opportunity to informally talk with discussants after the roundtable had finished, we held an online debrief session a few days later. Through the debrief and discussants' emailed comments, we heard about what worked, what did not, and what we could do differently next time. Most importantly, we confirmed that the event was a success, resulting in a thought-provoking discussion of a wide range of issues related to sexual harassment and assault.

## Recommendations for Convening a Conversation About Sexual Harassment and Violence

*Start with both a clear purpose and sufficient lead time.* It was no small task to collaboratively organize a two-part roundtable on a challenging topic with ten discussants for an online conference. Over eight months, the Working Group developed a plan, recruited discussants, convened three meetings with all roundtable discussants, met several times a month as a planning group, and spent many hours as individuals following up on action items that came out of all those meetings.

*Know that a collaborative planning process will take more time and effort, but it enriches the event.* Inviting discussants to a collaborative planning process was easily twice as much work as a regular panel, and twice as much as we had anticipated at the beginning. Lots of verbal and textual clarification and reiteration is necessary, particularly if you are asking discussants to respond to questions/scenarios in order to direct the conversation towards both particular examples and generalizable applications. Yet facilitating a collaborative planning process has many benefits: building relationships and establishing a conversational baseline before the event; noticing and addressing gaps in structure and content; and, developing a strategy to create and hold safe spaces for challenging and potentially triggering conversations.

*Set the purpose and tone with intention at every step.* Pay attention to structure as well as content. You cannot cover everything about sexual harassment in one or two conference sessions; identify the most relevant topics for your purpose and audience. How you ask questions is just as important as what questions you ask. This is about both phrasing and execution, as well as having a moderator experienced in facilitating equity-based and trauma-informed conversations.

*Do not try to reinvent the wheel; learn from existing practitioners.* Do an environmental scan (internet search) to see what similar organizations have already done and what resources already exist. Key resources include the following:

- “Campus Sexual Violence: Guidelines for a Comprehensive Response” (Ending Violence Association of BC 2016a)
- A collective working to make the shared discipline of anthropology a safer, more just space: <https://metooanthro.org/>

- Certified training for preventing sexual harassment and assault in field settings: <https://fieldworkfuture.ucsc.edu/index.html>
- A network of students and researchers facing sexual harassment and assault during fieldwork: <http://fieldworkinitiative.org/>
- A fairly comprehensive list of national crisis lines and provincial/territorial shelters and services: <https://canadianwomen.org/support-services/>
- Crisis Service Canada (24/7 national support line): 1-833-456-4566

We also did an environmental scan to develop the one-on-one support protocols and group debriefing protocols for discussants, which included the following:

- A one-on-one support protocol with a definition of the support worker's role; a list of general principles for offering trauma-informed crisis support; and a step-by-step guideline through the phases of building rapport, intervention, planning what to do next, and closure. This protocol was based on a review of selected crisis response training guides (Colorado Association Against Sexual Assault 2011; Ending Violence Association of BC 2016b; Klinik Community Health Centre 2013).
- A group debriefing protocol with self-care and grounding activities; a post-event group debrief consisting of a check-in, evaluation, and next steps; and a critical incident stress debrief (CISD) that we would use only if a traumatic event occurred. The CISD is a seven-stage process with an established methodology. These debriefing protocols were based on a review of selected guidelines and protocols (American Counselling Association 2011; International Critical Incident Stress Foundation 2016; Khan 2015).

## Next Steps

The inaugural roundtable organized by the Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group exceeded our expectations. We are grateful to all the invited discussants for the time and energy they dedicated to the planning process, and for the insights and expertise they shared during the roundtable.

In the coming year, the Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group will:

- Work with the Executive Committee to establish a dedicated space on CASCA's website with reports and resources for sexual harassment prevention, intervention, and response in the practice of anthropology.
- Launch a social media presence for CASCA members to network and exchange knowledge about sexual harassment in the practice of anthropology.
- Reflect on what we heard in the 2021 roundtable and draft guidelines with best practices for students, faculty, and researchers. These guidelines will go through a consultation and piloting process with CASCA members.
- Explore additional avenues for advocacy and support of CASCA members who are survivors of sexual harassment in professional settings.
- Plan another event for the CASCA 2022 conference.

The Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group welcomes new members, and wants to hear from you. Please reach out to us through the contact details provided above.

There is still—in 2022—a conversational vacuum around sexual harassment in the practice of anthropology. Across the discipline, and throughout our wider professional engagements, we need to make these invisible issues visible, to better prepare our students, to uplift our colleagues, and to empower ourselves and one another.

**Marieka Sax**

*University of Northern British Columbia,  
marieka.sax@unbc.ca*

**María Cristina Manzano-Munguía**

*Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de  
Puebla,  
mmanzanomunguia@gmail.com*

**Marie Michèle Grenon**

*Université Laval,  
marie-michele.grenon.1@ulaval.ca*

**Tara Joly**

*University of Northern British Columbia,  
tara.joly@unbc.ca*

## Notes

- 1 The CASCA Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group can be contacted at [marieka.sax@unbc.ca](mailto:marieka.sax@unbc.ca) or [marie-michele.grenon.1@ulaval.ca](mailto:marie-michele.grenon.1@ulaval.ca).
- 2 We are purposefully reporting on the roundtable in general terms as the many topics covered are complex and demand a more detailed and nuanced discussion than we can provide here. We will draw upon the concerns and recommendations expressed during the 2021 roundtable to draft the resources we are developing for CASCA members in our next steps.

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