



**INSTIGATING A CULTURE SHIFT:**

# **Campuses Can Combat Sexual Harassment and Violence**

by Jodi Hogerton

It's time for our society to take a long, hard look in the mirror. The expanding list of powerful men accused of sexual harassment, the proliferation of the #metoo movement drawing attention to the scope of sexual assault, and the staggering rates of campus sexual assault are all indications of an underlying sickness in our culture.







Drawing attention to the problem and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions are steps in the right direction, to be sure, but in order to foster true equality we must address the deep roots of these systematic problems and the power structures that support them.

### How Did We Get Here?

First, let's be honest about where "here" is. The increased attention to this problem is a positive development. The women and men who have felt safe enough to speak in public about the harassment and assault they have endured is a first step in overcoming our cultural tendency to sweep inconvenient truths under the rug.

It seems strange to use the word "revelation" in reference to the reports of gross misconduct by Hollywood bigwigs. The entertainment industry, while not alone, has done much to support narratives in which women are objectified, subjected to violence, and worth less than men. Is it really a shock when the industry that has for years reinforced gender stereotypes and power dynamics is actually rife with sexual misconduct? Of course, the

entertainment industry cannot take all the blame for our culture's harassment and assault epidemic.

Chris Kilmartin, a professor of Psychology and author of the textbook *The Masculine Self* placed the roots of the problem in "the cult of hyper-masculinity, which tells boys that aggression is natural and sexual conquest enviable" while adopting attitudes and ideals that women are inferior and weak.

It is worth keeping in mind that these attitudes were still pervasive in many aspects of our society until recently. Just 30 years ago, women needed a male relative to cosign in order to take out a business loan. Marital rape wasn't criminalized in all 50 states until 1993. While a court first recognized sexual harassment in 1977, it wasn't officially defined until 1980. Less than 40 years later, we still have misconceptions about what constitutes sexual harassment, consent, coercion, and assault.

### Predatory Behavior

The famous names associated with immoral behavior have the country's attention like a dumpster fire as people wonder who will be the

next on our growing list of "Bad Men." While it's refreshing to see perpetrators being held accountable, we must recognize that shaming the perpetrators does not equal a solution to the deep-seeded issues that have led us to this reckoning.

There are many reasons that people engage in predatory behavior, but one that is easier to address in this case is ignorance. It isn't difficult to imagine that at least some of the men on the list didn't recognize that their behavior was damaging to their victim.

Let's not forget that these men are products of the deeply conflicted culture that fetishizes violence and objectifies women on the screen, while condemning both of these things in the streets. In many cases, harassment takes place because the perpetrator lacks a clear understanding of boundaries, the power dynamics at play in a situation, and exactly what constitutes harassment.

The conversation around what constitutes sexual harassment has been largely confined to HR trainings, which have been revealed as largely ineffective. These trainings tend to focus on legal terminology and the process



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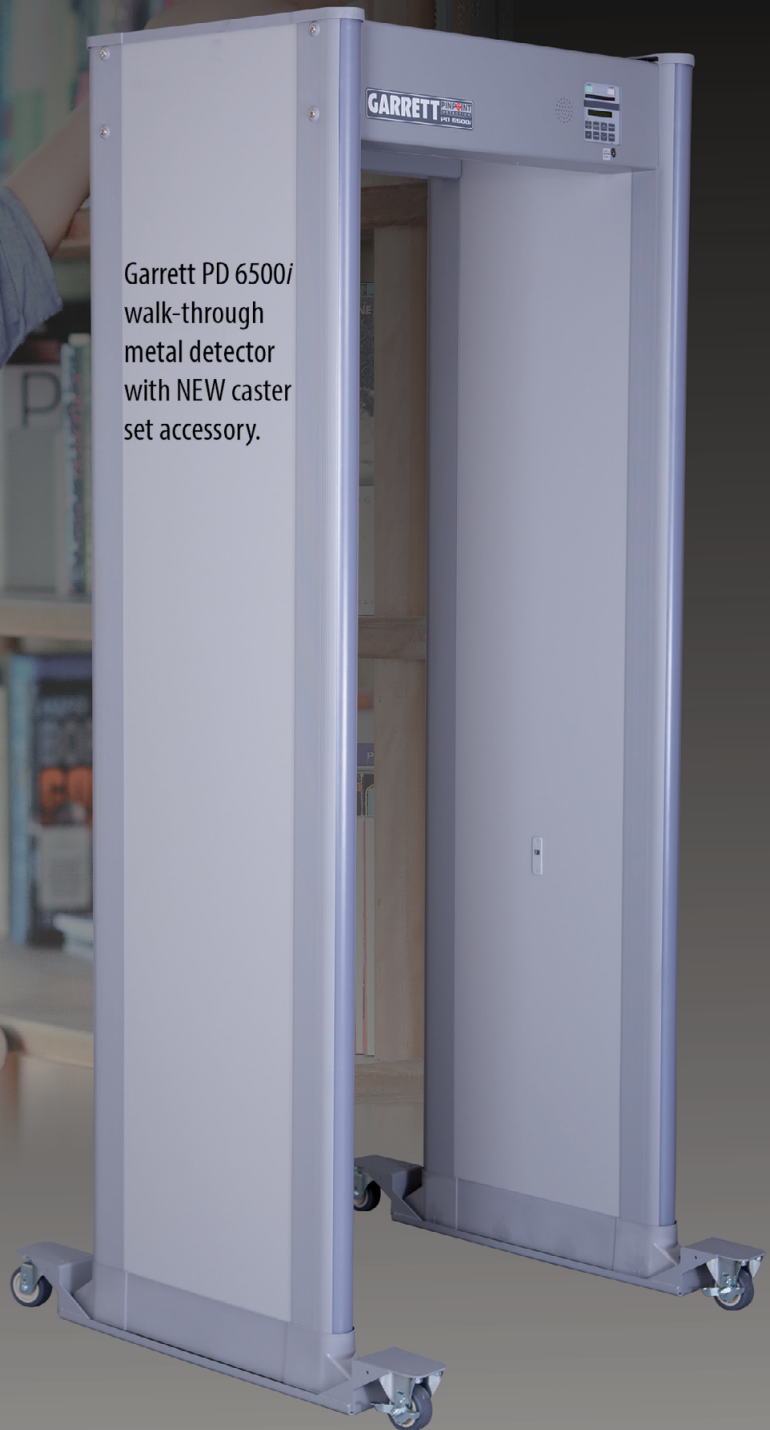
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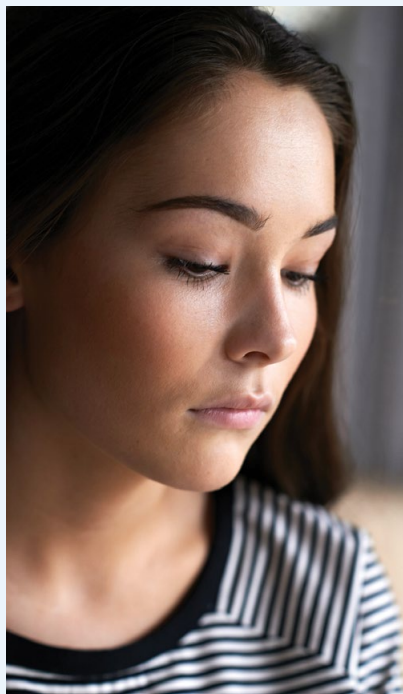
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### WHY DON'T VICTIMS REPORT?

- A belief that the experience doesn't constitute harassment or assault
- Acceptance of the experience as "just part of life"
- Feelings of not "putting up enough of a fight"
- Fear of judgment by others
- A belief that others will not believe them
- Questioning their own account of the event, and whether they are overreacting
- Feelings that they should be able to handle this on their own.
- Fear of retaliation
- Coercion and threats from the perpetrator

surrounding complaints rather than offering a sincere explanation of workplace boundaries, the reasons that subordinates can feel pressured, and the differences between flirting and harassment.

### It Starts on Campus

Campuses around the country are helping shape tomorrow's leaders. Attending college can be one of the most formative times in a young person's life, as many students experience their first taste of independence.

Campus administrators, campus safety authorities, residence life coordinators, and faculty can all play an invaluable role in the sea change our culture desperately needs.

First, campuses must embrace a multi-faceted communication strategy that teaches young people what constitutes consent, sexual assault, sexual harassment, coercion, and rape in ways that are real enough to connect with students.

Secondly, working with student groups is a must. Peer influence is stronger than ever with the rise of social media. With that in mind, students should be ambassadors for campus safety.

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Next, you should make it easier for students to communicate with Campus Safety. Whether they are reporting sexual misconduct, or have a question about something they witnessed or experienced, facilitating an open conversation will emphasize the campus commitment to safety and equality.

Additionally, be certain to consider the many factors that keep victims from reporting harassment and assault, and what can be done on campus to overcome these obstacles and encourage reporting.

Finally, be aware of the media shown on campus, and put campus support behind films and entertainment that promote equality and respect.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Jodi Hogerton holds a Master's Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Hogerton is a writer and advocate for sexual violence prevention, and has over four years of experience working in the safety and security sector.



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