Harassment
in Dutch academia

Exploring manifestations, facilitating factors, effects and solutions

Commissioned by the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH)

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Introduction

Over the last decades, investments have been increased to create an inclusive and safe academic environment for all academics, for instance through the development of social safety policies, the installation of diversity officers, and the provision of funds for marginalised groups. In accordance with these developments, research has called attention to questionable practices such as academic misconduct (e.g. Gross 2016), discrimination (e.g. Van den Brink and Benschop 2012, Clancy et al. 2017), bullying (e.g. Nielsen and Einarsen 2018) and sexual harassment (e.g. Thakur and Paul 2017, van der Ven 2017a, b, c), highlighting how such practices frustrate efforts to establish an environment in which all academics can thrive (Ahmed 2012).

The present study contributes to this strand of research, by exploring harassment in academia as an overarching term for all behaviour that obstructs scholars in their academic work and their career progress. We expect that harassment can be immediately task-related (such as exclusion from research and teaching projects, or senior academics claiming co-authorship of junior's publications), or more person-centred (such as exclusion from informal networks). Starting from the experiences of women academics and their stories of harassment, we want to gain a better understanding of the different manifestations and effects of scientific harassment, examine the academic infrastructures and disciplinary cultures that facilitate this kind of harmful behaviour, and explore possible solutions.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this study was to start developing knowledge that can contribute to creating an inclusive environment for all academics. Since research has shown that women academics face more barriers during their academic career and are still underrepresented in senior positions (LNVH 2017, Van den Brink and Benschop 2014), this study focused on the experiences of women. This is only a first step, and the report is explicitly meant to be a starting point for more elaborate and extensive research into the topic of harassment in academia– also among men and non-binary academics.

Starting from the experiences of women academics, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What practices of harassment can be identified in the stories and narratives of academic women? Is it possible to discern multiple manifestations of harassment?
2. What experiences are reported by whom? Which preliminary patterns can we discern?
3. What structural and cultural characteristics and developments in the academic system facilitate harassment?
4. What are the consequences of harassment for individuals, organisations and science in general?
5. What are promising suggestions for limiting negative consequences and for preventing harassment in academia?

This research provides a qualitative exploration that analyses the "what, why and how" of harassment, rather than its prevalence or other quantitative characteristics.

Research methods

For this first explorative research on harassment in Dutch academia, we used a qualitative approach. We started with a literature review of (workplace) harassment and related terms such as misconduct, bullying, and micro-aggressions. This enabled us to construct a theoretical framework that guided the empirical part of our study. The empirical part of our study consisted of two types of data collection: in-depth interviews and the collection of written testimonies. In order to recruit research participants, we shared a call via several academic (women's) networks[a] as well as personal networks. In this call, we asked women academics to share their experiences of harassment with us, either in writing or through an interview.

This resulted in 26 applications for an interview and 35 written testimonials. We selected 20 interviewees based on the criteria described in the next section, aiming for maximum diversity among participants in terms of experiences with harassment, academic institution and discipline, academic rank, age and other axes of social difference. These 20 interviews, combined with the written testimonials provided a rich dataset of harassment among women academics, that allowed us to distinguish multiple manifestations, brought insights in facilitating factors and multi-level effects of harassment. Of the written testimonials, two were about other people than the reporters themselves. We decided not to include these in our final analysis, so that all our data consist of personal, first-hand accounts. In total, our analysis is thus based on 20 interviews and 33 written testimonials.

The interviews enabled us to capture in detail women academic's experiences with harassment and the context in which this took place, to identify which cultural and structural factors in the academic system facilitate harassment, and to identify possible consequences. We used a semi-structured topic list for conducting the interviews, which contained questions regarding the following topics: descriptions of what happened (context, behaviours, effects, labelling of experiences), ideas about the link between harassment and systemic factors (social inequalities, characteristics of the academy), talking about the harassment and finding help, consequences for career, and ideas for preventing harassment. The interviews lasted between 31 and 144 minutes, with an average of 101 minutes. They were conducted in places chosen by research participants: at their homes, their offices and our offices, and cafés, to ensure that participants felt safe enough to discuss their experiences with us. Four interviews were conducted by phone due to logistic reasons. Most interviews were in Dutch, except for two which were in English.

Some but not all of the 33 testimonials followed the outline that was provided in our call: description of position as an academic, (e.g. position, age, cultural background, scientific discipline, et cetera), description of the other person or people involved, description of the situation (the year the incident took place, context, roles of the people involved, different interests et cetera), practices of harassment (what happened exactly, what was your response, did you discuss it with others, why or why not), and consequences (what did it mean for you, how did it influence your career, were there any consequences for the other person involved, et cetera). Since not all written testimonials followed this structure, they are not equally detailed, and some information is missing from certain written statements, such as whether the participant talked about the harassment with others. The length of the testimonials varied between 219 and 5.130 words, with an average of 1.285 words. Again, most (23) were in Dutch, except for 10 which were in English.

Almost all participants were highly concerned about issues regarding anonymity and confidentiality. They worried that there might be severe consequences if other people learned about their participation in this study. For some women, this was reason not to participate, or to share their story only "off the record" only. In order to protect research participants' privacy, we did not include complete individual cases in this report, and we changed details in individual stories in order to ensure anonymity. All participants who are quoted in the report received a concept version and were asked to provide feedback on their quotes, which resulted in additional minor changes to make quotes more precise or more anonymous.

Research participants

Our analysis is based on the personal stories of 53 research participants. Although this is not a quantitative study, and we did not aim for a representative sample, we aimed to collect diverse stories from a diverse group of women academics. First of all, we aimed to collect stories about different manifestations of harassment, from women in different academic institutions and disciplines, with different academic ranks. To a large extent, this was accomplished: we were able to collect information about many different manifestations of harassment and many different behaviours, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Moreover, participants who provided explicit information about where the harassment had happened, named 13 different institutions and a wide variety of disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and medical sciences. This happened while they were in various stages of their career, from (applying to become) PhD students to full professors, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The position of participants at the time of the interview/written report was slightly less diverse however:

Table 1. Respondent's position during participation in this study (n=53).

	n	%
Applying for PhD position	1	2%
PhD student	3	6%
Postdoctoral researcher	4	8%
Assistant professor	14	26%
Associate professor	9	17%
Professor	16	30%
Other	5	9%
Unknown	1	2%

Moreover, participants where diverse in terms of age, although a considerable number of participants (16) did not mention their age. Among the remaining participants, people in their thirties and people in their fifties seem to be slightly overrepresented in comparison to other age groups:

Table 2. Respondent's age during participation in this study (n=53).

	n	%
<20	0	0%
20-30	4	8%
30-40	13	25%
40-50	6	11%
50-60	10	19%
>60	4	8%
Unknown	16	30%

While some research participants belonged to minority groups based on ethnicity, sexuality, ability, citizenship, and geographical background, they were limited in number, and further research is required to investigate the experiences of these particular groups.

A group that unfortunately remains invisible in our study are gender non-conforming, non-binary, queer and transgender scientists. Previous research has demonstrated that these people are more vulnerable than others for becoming the victim of discrimination and harassment, also in the workplace (for a review, see McFadden and Crowley-Henry 2016). One respondent reported having witnessed harassment against a transgender colleague; unfortunately, this colleague did not participate in our study. Follow up research on this topic is thus required.

Finally, the women participating in this study did so based on self-selection. This means that women academics who do not label their experiences as "harassment" are not included. Moreover, we have been in contact with women who did label their experiences as harassment, but were not able or willing to participate. These were for instance women who did not dare to participate out of fear for the consequences; women who did not have the time or energy to participate, because all their energy was spent on surviving the harassment they went through; women who left academia and lost faith that it would ever become a better place; women who were harassed by students rather than colleagues; and women who were students when they were harassed by academic staff. This indicates that this report might capture the tip of the iceberg only.

Data analysis

To analyse the interviews and testimonials, we conducted a qualitative content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998) in which we combined inductive and deductive coding: while some themes and codes were deduced from the available literature, inductive coding enabled us to critically assess those codes, and to develop additional codes and themes. This involved close reading and coding of the collected data, continuously asking "what is happening" in those data (Charmaz and Bryant 2008, 376).

We started with an inductive round of coding in which we open coded all the stories of respondents separately. This way, we developed first-order codes of different manifestations of harassment, facilitating factors and effects (e.g. "denial of authorship", "destruction of data", "refusal of promotion"). We discussed the patterns by comparing and contrasting the different first-order codes, which resulted in second-order codes (e.g. "scientific sabotage"). We then used the second order codes to recode the material and build a storyline about the different manifestations of harassment, facilitating factors and effects.

H1 | Theoretical framework

Harassment in academia - a definition

Previous research has called attention to a variety of problematic practices within academic contexts, for which different concepts and definitions are used. Gross (2016) for instance reviewed studies about "scientific misconduct". Following the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF), Gross defines this as fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism: "Fabrication is making up data or results. Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing data or results. Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit" (Gross 2016, 694).

Marín-Spiotta (2017) points out that this definition focuses on how researchers treat data, rather than how they treat people. She uses the concept of harassment in order to shift attention to the latter, and specifies: "when talking about harassment, I am not referring to socially awkward interactions but to well-defined and documented behaviours […] that create a hostile work environment". Such a definition of harassment, that focuses on the effect of generating a hostile work environment, is in line with other definitions of the concept (McDonald 2012). For instance, in a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council,[1] harassment is defined as unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct, that has the purpose or effect of "violating the dignity of a person", and that produces "an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment". This definition has also been used in the Working Conditions Catalogue of Dutch universities, which informed other work on the topic (e.g. van der Ven 2017 a, b, c).

In their descriptions and definitions of harassment, some authors put more emphasis on the unwelcome, hostile or "chilling" environment that is created through such practices (Burke 2017, Fitzgerald et al. 1998), while others emphasise more the effect it has on the people working in that environment (Ahmed 2015). In her blog post about a harassment campaign against a student, Ahmed (2015) refers to the French roots of the concept: harasser, which she translates as "tire out, vex", and possibly Old French harer, which she translates as "stir up, provoke; set a dog on". Harassment, according to Ahmed, stirs up trouble by attempting to wear people down, to tire them out.

In the present research project, we follow Marín-Spiotta in analysing scientific misconduct in terms of how people, rather than data, are treated. We use the concept of "harassment in academia" to signpost this focus on people. We explore harassment in academia as an overarching term for patterns of intense behaviour that have the aim and/or effect of violating a person's dignity and/or that create a hostile working environment, thereby obstructing scholars in their academic work and their career progress.

Many different terms have been used to analyse this phenomenon. As Crawshaw points out in the introduction to a special issue of Consulting Psychology Journal (2009), just that special issue alone already includes an incredibly wide variety of concepts, including for example abuse, aggression, bullying, mobbing, counterproductive workplace behaviour, harassment, hostile workplace behaviour, maltreatment, mistreatment, psychological terror, scapegoating, vexatious behaviour, workplace incivility, and workplace psychological violence.

[1] Directive 2006/54/EC, http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2006/54/oj, date of access 22 February 2019.

Especially the terms harassment, mobbing and bullying are frequently interchangeably used in the literature (Einarsen 2010, Nielsen and Einarsen 2018). Mobbing and bullying are generally used for structural and long-term misbehaviours however; not for single episodes of harassment (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018). Moreover, studies about mobbing and bullying often leave out sexual harassment. For instance, in their "overview of reviews" about workplace bullying, Nielsen and Einarsen (2018) do not include any research about sexual harassment. Also, physical harassment receives only little attention in this overview: the focus is mostly on psychological types of bullying. In the present study, we wanted to include not only psychological, but also sexual and physical harassment, as well as "single episodes" of such behaviours. Therefore, we chose to use the concept of harassment rather than mobbing or bullying. Moreover, in order to specify that we discuss harassment in academic contexts rather than other workplace contexts, we employ the term "harassment in academia".

Behaviours that may count as harassment are diverse, and they may include both verbal and non-verbal behaviours (e.g. shouting or staring at someone), physical and non-physical behaviours (e.g. grabbing or making degrading "jokes"), sexual and non-sexual behaviours (e.g. making a sexual comment or ignoring someone), online and offline behaviours (e.g. sending threatening e-mails or interrupting someone during a meeting), direct and indirect behaviours (e.g. calling someone names or gossiping behind one's back) and task-related and person-related behaviours (e.g. excluding someone from work projects or excluding them from informal networks). It is important to note that whether a certain behaviour counts as harassment, is influenced by situational factors such as characteristics of the situation and characteristics of the rater. For instance, identical behaviour may be evaluated as more negative when displayed by a supervisor in comparison to a subordinate or peer (Gutek 1995, 449-450). In the present research project, we follow Gutek's advice to take such situational factors into account. This means that rather than deciding a priori which behaviours constitute harassment, we will explore which experiences are labelled as harassment by research participants in the light of different situational factors.

Harassment, discrimination, inequalities and power relations

Several academics have pointed out that some groups are more likely to fall victim to harassment than others. These are marginalised groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities (Martin 2003, Lopez, Hodson, and Roscigno 2009, McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012, Atherton et al. 2016, Reid and Clayton 1992). This signals that harassment is related to discrimination, which may be defined as "acts, practices, or policies that impose a relative disadvantage on persons based on their membership in a salient social group" (Altman 2016). Discrimination denies the equal moral status of people, and makes people vulnerable to domination and oppression (Altman 2016, Hellman 2008). In the present research project, discrimination is therefore considered as a form of harassment, because it violates a person's dignity and contributes to a hostile work environment.

While discrimination refers to actions that disadvantage minority groups, these actions may be rooted in beliefs about those groups being less worthy. These beliefs are usually referred to in terms of -isms such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, ableism, ageism and classism. Central to both discriminatory actions and

beliefs is that they are rooted in, and reproduce, structural social inequalities (Altman 2016) based on gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, ability, age, class, etcetera. Therefore, it is important to also consider how harassment is intertwined with broader structural inequalities.

In the present research project, we study the experiences of women academics. Studies have shown that women are more prone to be confronted with violence by familiar people such as partners and family members, especially to structural forms of violence (e.g. Cruyff et al. 2019). As is stated in the much-quoted UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993): "violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women", and "violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men". Women still have marginalised positions in Western societies in sectors such as politics, media and corporate life. Women academics face more barriers during their academic career and are still underrepresented in senior positions (LNVH 2017, Van den Brink and Benschop 2014). Because of the marginalised position of women both in relation to violence and in relation to academic representation, as well as in society in general, this study focuses on the experiences of women academics.

We do not understand gender, or power, in a simplified, one-dimensional way however, as "men oppressing women". Instead, we understand power as a productive force, as a multiplicity of force relations, that are produced, transformed, strengthened and reversed through struggles and confrontations (Foucault 1978 [1976], 92). This means that in our analysis of harassment, we will be sensitive to the dynamic workings of power that may be involved. In terms of workplace relations, such an approach is fruitful in analysing how power may work in complex ways. For instance, women in senior positions are privileged in comparison to women in junior position because of their position, which provides them with status and benefits, positioning these women within the "masculine hegemony" (Sheridan, McKenzie, and Still 2011).

At the same time, such organisational authority does not necessarily protect these women from harassment. Even more so, women in traditionally "masculine" functions may experience even more harassment, which functions as a way of "keeping women in their place" (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012). This has been labelled "contrapower harassment", a term coined by Benson in 1984 to describe situations where someone with seemingly less power (e.g. a student) harasses someone more powerful (e.g. a professor) (Lampman et al. 2016). Research into this topic (e.g. DeSouza 2011, Lampman et al. 2016) demonstrates that it is important to be alert to the potentially complex workings of power in cases of harassment.

Next to gender, also other axes of social difference may play a role, such as race/ethnicity, with scholars emphasising for example that gender works differently for women of different social groups (Clancy et al. 2017, Williams 2014). Williams (2014, 185-186) for instance quotes a focus group participant who explains: "For example, the stereotype that women of certain groups have 'too many babies' affects perceptions of which women take time for family leave." Another example that is mentioned in this study (Williams 2014, 202) is that of the "black angry woman", which compromises black women's possibilities to perform assertiveness in the workplace. Based on studies such as these, we pay extra attention to the experiences of women from marginalised groups as much as our data allow us to.

Prevalence and facilitating factors

There is a substantial body of literature on harassment and bullying in academia, showing how this is disturbingly prevalent and damages lives, careers and institutions (Miller et al. 2019, Misawa 2015). With regard to prevalence, numbers vary considerably because of the different concepts, definitions and methods that are used (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018). In their meta-analysis of 102 prevalence estimates of bullying from 86 samples (n=130.973), Nielsen and colleagues (2010) estimated that about 15% of employees on a global basis are exposed to some level of workplace bullying. Studies about sexual harassment report even higher prevalence rates, especially among women and especially when participants were asked questions about specific behaviours rather than about "sexual harassment" generally (National Academies of Sciences 2018, Ilies et al. 2003). A robust meta-analysis by Ilies and colleagues demonstrated for instance that on average, 58% of US women academics have experienced sexually harassing behaviours at work, including gender-based harassment (2003, 624-625).

Some studies about harassment and bullying in academia focus on individual coping strategies, others on contextual factors that serve as cause and consequence of harassment (Keashly and Neuman 2010). These latter studies have pointed to the structural and cultural characteristics of the academy that facilitate harassment. Academic structures are highly hierarchical, with individual people having the power to make or break someone else's career (Amienne 2017). Studies on recruitment, selection and/or promotion show how decision makers have ample leeway to secure their own interests, at the expense of some (groups of) candidates in more precarious positions (Herschberg, Benschop, and Van den Brink 2018b). From these studies, we also know that promotions are often primarily research-driven, and (the development of) leadership skills is not always a priority (Evans 2017).

Hierarchical structures are known to enable misconduct and power abuse of those in power (Rosenblatt 2012). Also, contemporary academic cultures can be characterized as competitive, performance driven and individualized – characteristics that hinder collegiality (Macfarlane 2016, Phipps and McDonnell 2016), promote a strong sense of entitlement and desire for individual autonomy (Keashly and Neuman 2010), and encourage harassing behaviours (Anonymous Academic 2018, Brookshire 2018).

Moreover, studies show that harassment in the academy cannot be separated from gender (National Academies of Sciences 2018, Simpson and Cohen 2004, Ilies et al. 2003). Ilies and colleagues (2003) found that in the US out of four different sectors (the academy, the military, the private sector, and the government), the two most male-dominated sectors, the academy and the military, also had the highest prevalence rates of harassment.[2] The gendered context of the academy thus seems to be an important factor to take into account when analysing harassment in academia.

Harassment as a subjective concept

Literature about workplace harassment and bullying has demonstrated that the evaluation of harassment is partly subjective. For instance, in relation to sexual harassment a general academic consensus seems to exist about the most explicit and abusive sexual misconducts, such as demanding sexual favours in exchange for academic advancement. Discussion remains however about other practices such as staring, whistling, sexual joking and sexual innuendoes (Pina, Gannon, and Saunders 2009, 127). (Sexual) harassment thus has a subjective component in that people may define it in different ways, or have different evaluations of a particular scenario (Gutek 1995, Basson 2007, Pina, Gannon, and Saunders 2009). As an example, Basson (2007, 429) explains how some employees may perceive a work environment where pictures of nude or scantily clad women are displayed as hostile, while others may disagree with that.

According to Basson (2007, 432-434), there are three "tests" that can be applied to decide upon "borderline cases": a subjective test, an objective test and a compromise test. Using a subjective test means that the perception of the victim is central to the process of determining whether (sexual) harassment has taken place. This approach has been criticised for facilitating "supersensitive employees who might find any situation hostile" (Basson 2007). In an "objective" test, the circumstances are evaluated from the perspective of a fictional "independent observer", also referred to in law as the "reasonable man/woman/person". This approach has been criticised for being based on society's dominant values, which makes it into a subjective rather than an objective test. The compromise, which Basson refers to as the "reasonable victim test", takes into consideration both the perception of the victim and the circumstances, including for instance whether there is fault on the part of the perpetrator.

Whereas the latter approach may be the most useful one in legal contexts (Basson 2007, 434), the present research is positioned in the first approach, using the "subjective test" in analysing women academics' stories of harassment. This means that we take victims' interpretations and evaluations of incidents as our starting point. We investigate what is experienced and constructed as harassment by research participants, and how this relates to our definition of harassment. We do not expect this focus on victims' perspectives to result in overreporting, since previous studies have demonstrated that harassment tends to be underreported rather than overreported (McDonald 2012, Clodfelter et al. 2010, Magley and Shupe 2005, Littleton, Axsom, and Yoder 2006, Ilies et al. 2003). These studies demonstrated that in general, victims are reluctant rather than over-enthusiastic to label their experiences as harassment, for instance because they question the seriousness of an incident, because the incident does not match their definition of harassment or violence, or because they do not want to label themselves as victims.

[2] The military had the highest prevalence rates (69%), followed by the academy (58%), the private sector (46%) and the government (43%).

H2 | Manifestations of harassment in academia

In this chapter, we will provide an answer to our first and second research question:

1. What practices of harassment can be identified in the stories and narratives of academic women? Is it possible to discern multiple manifestations of harassment?
2. What experiences are reported by whom? Which preliminary patterns can we discern?

In order to provide an idea of the testimonies we received in answer to our call for women academics to report their experiences with harassment, we will start this chapter with two stories. These stories did not happen as such: in order to protect our participants' anonymity, we do not present complete individual cases. Instead, the stories are compositions of different participants' experiences, in which details have been changed. We composed them in a way so that they are representative of our research participants' stories, and provide an idea of what harassment in academia may look like.

"I can only tell you this story without breaking down because of the medication I take: anti-anxiety drugs and antidepressants. I'm extremely passionate about science, as is demonstrated by the research I've done, the articles I published in highly esteemed journals, my collaboration with international colleagues, my teaching activities, my membership in all kinds of committees and my investments in valorisation. But daily life at my department is a constant struggle.

It all started about five years ago, when I started exploring the opportunities for becoming a full professor. I met the criteria, but was told that there was no budget to promote me- which was remarkable, since several of my male colleagues were promoted in that same period. I started asking critical questions about this, but Mike, the head of the department, never provided an explanation. Colleagues from other departments were also very surprised when I told them that I would not be promoted anytime soon.

One day, Mike invited me for a meeting. When I arrived, HR was also present. The meeting quickly became very unpleasant, with Mike summing up all the "huge mistakes" I had been making over the last years, none of which had ever been topic of conversation before. When I objected, he started yelling at me, saying that I was an under-average scientist who would never make it in the academic world. HR informed me that I'd better start looking for another job, and that they were building a 'dossier' about me.

Since then, things went downhill rather fast. Mike and other colleagues started ignoring me. I was not invited at meetings anymore, and neither did I receive any minutes, so I was no longer informed about developments at our department. If I was present at a meeting and tried to contribute, my colleagues expressed lack of interest by leaning back, folding their arms, looking out the window, or checking their phones. One day, when I suggested a certain line of research, Mike responded: "Sure, we could also investigate the secret lives of earth worms, but the point is: nobody cares." None of my colleagues objected, and some of them even laughed about this "joke". I felt humiliated and alone. Sometimes, I see pictures of my colleagues enjoying dinner or drinks together: social events for which I am no longer invited.

In the meantime, this 'dossier' is being made, obviously with the aim of firing me, and I feel like there's nothing I can do to stop it. When I call in sick, I immediately receive critical questions and negative comments: 'Are you really sick?' 'How long do you have to stay home?' 'When will you be able to visit the medical officer?' 'Better be back soon, because your absence places a huge burden on your colleagues.' 'If this job is too much for you, maybe you should consider looking for another job.' In formal evaluations, remarks are made about me 'finding it hard to keep up with the academic pace', and 'having a hard time cooperating with colleagues'. Everything I do is explained in a negative way. It feels like torture.

I do go to work every day, but I cannot concentrate anymore. Sometimes, I just sit and stare at my computer screen. Sometimes, when I come home after a day's work, all I can do is sit on the couch and cry. I have even been hospitalised for a few days when I collapsed after another horrible, intimidating telephone conversation with Mike. It feels like I'm in a warzone.

I reached out for help to different people: the medical officer, the committee for scientific integrity, the dean, and even the executive board. None of them was able or willing to help however. The dean even told me that it was better not to antagonise Mike, if I still wanted to pursue an academic career. She literally said that 'he is a star' who brings in big research grants, so it's highly unlikely that any action will be undertaken against him. I'm not sure how long I can keep going on anymore. I'm a scientist at heart, but I don't think the Academy is the right place for me."

"My first encounter with Fred was halfway into my postdoctoral research. He had just been appointed at our university, and my supervisor suggested that he might be a welcome addition to the team, since he had just supervised a research project on a similar topic. I was enthusiastic about this idea, and immediately arranged a meeting with my supervisor and Fred. It didn't take long for me to start feeling uncomfortable about him however. It sounds a bit weird to say this, and I understand if you don't believe me, but I felt like he was hitting on me. When we first met and shook hands, he looked me up and down, and got this particular smile on his face, saying that he found it 'very nice' to meet me. I didn't really know how to respond, but the rest of the conversation went right past me.

Afterwards, I started rationalising the event, and told myself that I had probably misinterpreted Fred's behaviour. Otherwise, my first supervisor would have said something, right? Over the following months however, more incidents happened. For instance, Fred came by in my office multiple times a day, without any obvious reason or goal. I never really knew how to respond, and often just froze. Over the course of time, I got into a constant state of alertness, always expecting him to suddenly show up. He also asked all kinds of questions about my personal life, especially my relationship: whether I was in a relationship, for how long, whether I had had many boyfriends before, whether I really loved my husband, those kinds of things. Once, I asked to plan a meeting to discuss one of my papers, and he replied that it would be 'his pleasure'; yet another one of those ambiguous remarks that made me feel very uncomfortable. The scariest incident was when we arrived at work simultaneously, and took the elevator together. After the doors had closed, the elevator went up with a little 'shock'. He pretended to lose his balance, and 'fell' against me. I was disgusted and scared: what would happen next? Luckily, we quickly arrived at our floor, and I managed to avoid him the rest of that day.

After some time, I decided to try and talk about it with Fred. I gathered all my strength, went to his office, and told him that I felt like he was hitting on me, and that I was not interested. He just laughed, and said that I could always change my mind, and that he was very 'open minded'. Nothing changed. I started having panic attacks, and didn't dare to go to the office anymore. One day, I woke up and literally couldn't get up anymore. I was diagnosed with a burn-out.

And the worst is yet to come… After having been at home for about half a year, I received an e-mail from my first supervisor, congratulating me on the publication of my article. I was surprised, because I had not been able to do any writing, let alone publishing, over the last months. When I saw the article, I was in shock: this was my paper, with some minor adjustments, and with Fred as first author! I sent an e-mail to my supervisor explaining the situation, but he told me that it was not uncommon for supervisors to become first author, and that Fred probably needed the publication for his grant application. I e-mailed Fred that I found his behaviour unethical, and that I considered filing a complaint with the ethics committee. His reaction was very aggressive: he had finished the article while I was 'sitting at home', thinking he was doing me a favour, and now his reward was defamation and the destruction of his career.

I'm not sure what to do next: I could go to the ethics committee, but that still wouldn't solve the other issue with Fred. For that, I could go to our confidential advisor, but I'm afraid they won't believe me. Even if they do believe me, I'm not sure whether they will be able to change this situation. I don't believe a formal procedure to be very promising, because I don't have much evidence and it will be my word against his. My supervisor is kind and friendly, but he mostly wants to maintain peace, so I don't expect much of him either. Most of all, I just don't have the energy to figure this all out: I'm tired."

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss some general characteristics of the cases that were included in our research. After that, we will discuss six different manifestations of harassment that can be distinguished based on our research findings. One of these, which we have labelled "scientific sabotage", is more directly related to academic practice than the other five, which are also common in other sectors. We will explain each manifestation of harassment by providing a definition, a description and examples.

General characteristics and patterns

As the introductory stories demonstrate, we found that harassment in academia seldom manifests itself as a single, isolated incident. Research participants hardly ever reported about one single remark, one single touch, or one single gesture. Rather, the harassment they experienced was structural and lasted for months, years or even decades. It often concerned a combination of different types of behaviours. This structural, systematic, and multiple character of harassment resulted in people feeling unwelcome, intimidated and excluded, and profoundly impacted people's physical and mental wellbeing, as well as their academic work and careers.

Still, many research participants had severe doubts about whether their experiences actually "counted" as harassment, even if they had experienced rather severe misbehaviours. They asked themselves highly critical questions: did I interpret the other person's behaviour correctly? Did I do something wrong to deserve this? Am I being overly sensitive? This confirms previous research stating that victims are hesitant rather than eager to label their experiences as harassment and to speak up about it (McDonald 2012, Clodfelter et al. 2010, Magley and Shupe 2005, Littleton, Axsom, and Yoder 2006). Moreover, many participants were threatened in some way that they might lose their job if they "made any (more) trouble". Some participants were even forced to sign a contract not to talk about the mistreatments they experienced, which made it extremely risky for them to participate. Participants thus had a lot to lose, and personally little or nothing to gain by participating in this study, but shared their stories to fuel collective discussions about this phenomenon in the academic setting.

Our 53 research participants testified about 62 experiences with harassment, taking place in different stages of their academic career:

Table 3. Respondent's position(s) during experience(s) with harassment (n=62).

	n	%
Applying for PhD position	3	5%
PhD student	11	18%
Postdoctoral researcher	5	8%
Assistant professor	17	27%
Associate professor	12	19%
Professor	12	19%
Other	2	3%

Although our sample is not representative, we can observe in this table that harassment is experienced in all different stages of academic careers, from the most junior to the most senior level.

In terms of the position and gender of the people who performed this harassment, a remarkable trend can be distinguished:

Table 4. Position of the person performing the harassment (n=82)

	n	%
Supervisor/manager	57	70%
Colleague (lower position)	2	2%
Colleague (similar position)	14	17%
Colleague (higher position)	6	7%
Other	3	4%
Professor	12	19%
Other	2	3%

Table 5. Gender of the person performing the harassment (n=82)

	n	%
Man	64	78%
Woman	15	18%
Other	3	4%

These tables show that in our study, a large majority of the people performing the harassment were supervisors/managers rather than colleagues, and men rather than women. Again, our sample of respondents is not representative, but our data point towards a pattern of who is performing the harassment.

Based on our data, we distinguish six different manifestations of harassment: **scientific sabotage, sexual harassment, physical and verbal threats, denigration, exclusion, and not facilitating "special needs".** In the following sections, we will go deeper into the characteristics of these manifestations.

Scientific sabotage

The first manifestation of harassment in academia is a manifestation that we have labelled as "scientific sabotage". We define this as all behaviours that directly obstruct a person's work as a scientist. Within the category of scientific sabotage, we distinguish five sub-categories.

The first manifestation of scientific sabotage is that of making a person's work, ideas and expertise invisible. This is done in many different ways. It is done for instance by not encouraging, or even actively discouraging people from publishing articles (R2, R14) or applying for a job or a promotion (R2, R15). It is also done by taking a person's name of publications or grant proposals, stealing their data or ideas, committing plagiarism, or making them second or third author while their role was that of single or first author (R2, R4, R5, R6, R14, V3, V6, V35). Furthermore, people are made invisible by removing, or forcing them to remove information about themselves from the Internet (R8, R15) or by having them withdraw a grant proposal (R15). Other ways in which research participants were made invisible was by not being given the opportunity to provide input in meetings or important documents, even if they were known for being an expert on the topic (R11, V2, V7, V31). In another case, the person performing the harassment denied that our research participant participated in a project, even though she did participate (V9). Yet another way in which people are made invisible is by not mentioning their accomplishments in meetings, presentations, reports, or on institutional websites (R15, V1, V2, V7, V25).

Closely related to this manifestation of scientific sabotage is the second one, namely the refusal of promotion while a candidate is suitable and a position available, or the denial of courses (V11), tasks and functions that are needed for a promotion. Several participants recalled how their application for becoming a PhD student, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, manager/director or board member was refused or actively frustrated (V5, V7, R9, R16, R17), for instance through sudden changes in the promotion criteria (R17) or the terms of employment (V5), or through disproportionally negative reviews of their application (V7). In one case, an entire chair was cancelled when it became clear that our research participant was, for several reasons, the only suitable candidate (R9). In other cases, participants were denied courses, tasks or functions which they needed in order to become eligible for promotion. These may be tasks or functions such as teaching (R14, V11), the coordination of a course or a Master's programme (R10, R17), supervision of PhD students (R8, R15, V9), participation in/coordination of prestigious research projects (R16), or chairing a conference (R5). Some participants described how instead, they were assigned a disproportionate amount of work that is generally regarded as much less prestigious, such as administrative work, BA-level teaching, or grading (R1, R4, R9, R14). Through such types of scientific sabotage, our respondents feel like they are actively being made "unsuitable" for promotion.

A third manifestation of scientific sabotage is that of blocking a person's access to certain spaces, documents, objects or pieces of information which they need in order to do their job. For instance, respondents were forbidden to access spaces such as the university building, a laboratory or their own office (R6, R9, R15, R18). In one case, a research participant was warned that she would be removed by security guards if she didn't leave (R15). Other respondents were blocked from accessing their research data (R5, R13), their mailbox (R13) or personal belongings which they had stored in their office (R8). A rather specific form of this manifestation of scientific sabotage is that of blocking access to specific information related to a person's work (e.g. a draft version of important documents such as a new strategic plan -R8, V2-, the dates of meetings -R8-, feedback -R14, V2-, the announcement of a close colleague's visit -V9-) or related to their career (e.g. information about education opportunities and courses -R14, V11- vacancies -R2-, grants -R15, R16-).

A fourth manifestation of scientific sabotage concerns the labelling of people as incompetent vis-à-vis colleagues from within or outside that person's organisation. Sometimes, this was done in their direct presence. Research participants reported for instance about colleagues or supervisors being on the look-out for small mistakes and labelling these as "huge" or "crucial" errors (R8, R9, R18, V19, V30) or as "unacceptable missteps" (R15, V2, V7, V28), thereby creating an "atmosphere of negativity" around them (V7) and/or building a formal dossier that is later used to fire them (R15). In some cases, participants felt that critiques were based on unfeasible criteria, such as having to inform a superior about a journal's deadline, even though this deadline is still unknown (R15), or that they were based on extremely small mistakes, such as not including a supervisor in a regular e-mail sent to the library (V19) or coffee being delivered at a meeting too late (V30). Often, the critique was aimed at a person's work, and many participants had experience with receiving negative comments on their work which they (and sometimes also other colleagues) experienced as disproportionate (R9, R15, R16, R17, V7, V14, V16, V18, V28, V34). These negative comments were usually not substantiated with evidence or explanations. In some cases, colleagues or supervisors also pro-actively tried to collect negative evaluations about someone from their direct colleagues, in order to justify formal steps (R15, V7).

Labelling people as incompetent was not only done in the direct presence of that person however. It was also done behind their backs, in the form of gossip and (formal) complaints. One research participant for instance reported how a colleague personally called each member of a selection committee to convince them not to hire her (R5), and another research participant testified about a colleague telling her new co-workers and several funding organisations about her being incompetent (V7). In yet another case, an e-mail was sent to all potential employers of our research participant, telling them that she was a "bad scientist". In other cases, rumours were spread and complaints were filed about research participants lacking scientific integrity (R3, R13, R14), profiting financially from other people's work (R6), and saying negative things about their colleagues (R11). Practices such as these may cause damage to a person's reputation, and may even result in that person being fired and/or not being able to obtain certain jobs or positions.

A fifth and final manifestation of scientific sabotage is the physical or financial destruction of a person's research project. Respondents testified about data being destroyed (R13), projects being sabotaged and/or ended (R2, R4, V1, V13), money being confiscated (R6) and contracts being ended (V31). For some research participants, this also meant the end of their employment.

These forms of scientific sabotage are the more specific and unique ways harassment takes place in academia. Yet, research participants experienced various other manifestations of harassment, that occur in other sectors as well and will be discussed below.

Sexual harassment

The Working Conditions Catalogue for the Dutch universities, compiled by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), defines sexual harassment as any verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour with sexual connotations that has the aim or effect of violating a person's dignity, especially when it contributes to the creation of an intimidating, hostile, offending, humiliating, or hurtful working environment.[1]

Research participants described how their experiences with sexual harassment included remarks, "compliments" and "jokes" that were implicitly or explicitly sexual; non-verbal behaviours such as staring, gazing at someone's body (parts) and standing very close to someone; physical contact such as touching and

grabbing; attempts to arrange meetings via media that are experienced as private, such as WhatsApp, and/or at locations and times that are considered private, for instance at home during the weekend; and sexual invitations.

Sometimes, these behaviours were so ambiguous, that participants doubted whether they could actually be classified as sexual harassment. For instance, a remark about a meeting being someone's "pleasure" (R7), a "joke" about feeling sorry that a colleague is married (R13) or an invitation for a meeting at a colleague's home (R7) may sound rather innocent in and on itself. These incidents hardly ever take place in isolation however: in many cases, they are part of a series of disturbing events including sexual insinuations, as was also demonstrated in the second introductory story to this chapter.

Moreover, several participants recalled having addressed the issue, telling the other person that they experienced their behaviour as unpleasant. In the cases we studied, this never resulted in the other person ending the behaviour. To the contrary: their practices often became more hostile and aggressive. In one case, the alleged perpetrator even responded by accusing our research participant of harassing him (R7).

Physical and verbal threats

A third manifestation of harassment is that of physical and verbal threats. These are all verbal and physical behaviours that have the aim and/or effect of intimidating people. The most common verbal behaviours we encountered were yelling, screaming and cursing (R4, R11, R13, R15, R16, V2, V7, V16, V19, V29, V32, V35) and the threat to fire someone and/or to ruin their career (R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R14, R15, V35). Sometimes, these threats were rather direct: "I'll make sure you will not finish your PhD" (R14) or "Don't resist. If you want to get something, you need to bow your head in front of him. He has long arms and the Netherlands is a small country. You would not have a scientific career here" (R15).

In other cases, it was more indirect: "If you don't like it here, then why don't you leave?" (R16, R17). Whereas these threats are directly related to someone's employment, other threats were more personal: "I know where to find you", or "I'm not done with you yet" (R13). In one case, "mistakes" of employees were listed and discussed during department meetings, which created a "culture of fear" (V19).

Physical threats that were brought up by research participants include leaning over someone (V2), aggressively pointing a finger at someone's face (V2), slamming on tables (V7), and barging into someone's office without knocking, refusing to leave (R1). Like in the case of sexual violence, the practices described here are usually part of a pattern of threatening behaviours that makes people scared of their job and their well-being.

Denigration

Fourthly, research participants experienced harassment that may be labelled as denigration. This refers to all behaviours that have the aim and/or effect of humiliating or belittling people, and that are overtly expressed in the direct presence of those people. Denigration can take place in a private meeting, or in a context where also other people are present. In case of the latter, where other people are present, we consider the behaviour to be not just denigration, but also defamation (and thus scientific sabotage), because it directly obstructs a person's work as a scientist. In the present section, we focus on denigration: the humiliation or belittling of people, with or without an "audience".

Denigration is mostly done through verbal comments such as "jokes" and condescending remarks about a person's personal characteristics or their professional qualities. Denigrating behaviours often allude to structural inequalities and stereotypes. For instance, several research participants reported about sexist and racist comments denigrating women and ethnic minorities in general or one person in particular (R16, R17, R18, V2). One participant reported about a colleague referring to the General Office as "the worker bees" (R16). Several participants remembered being confronted with the stereotype of the "emotional" or "hysterical" woman, through remarks such as "women are always so emotional" or "your response is so emotional" (R6, R10, R16, R17, V2, V7), as well as to the stereotype of the "bitch" (R11). Other research participants recalled racist remarks such as: "Why are you getting involved with that blackie?", referring to a black colleague (R16). In some cases, accents of ethnic and geographical minorities were mocked and criticised (V2, R4, R15, R16) and condescending remarks were made about people working outside of the Randstad (R16). One respondent was given the derogatory nickname "Peasant Professor" by colleagues working in the Randstad (R16). Also, research participants testified that denigrating remarks were made about their assumed religious background (R16), their voice (R15), their body (R4, R9) and their age (R11, V5, V13).

A specific set of denigrating behaviours are those referring to a person's professional qualities, their field of expertise and/or their methodological preferences. Several respondents report being called "stupid", "incompetent", "un-promising", "bad researchers" or "bad managers" (R6, R14, R15, R16, R17, R18, V2, V16). One participant reports how her supervisor "burnt her down" for over half an hour: "Even when I started crying, she kept going, telling me how badly I performed for a PhD student" (V19).

Some research participants were told they just got a certain job or task "because they are a woman" (V15, V21). Especially when women academics reach a certain position when measures are in place to increase the number of women in the academic top, women's achievements are easily dismissed as "presents" rather than their own achievements: "First you treat me worse than my male colleagues, and then, because I 'struggle' to meet the specified criteria you start 'facilitating' me, so that myself and every male colleague will think I became full professor by grace of my male dean and supervisor" (V33). Remarks about women getting promoted "because of their gender" rather than their professional qualities were experienced as highly denigrating by our research participants.

Denigrating behaviours also targeted respondents' field of expertise, which were dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant (R4, V18, V23, V31). Fields of expertise that were mentioned as targets were the social sciences, the "softer" subfields of "hard" sciences, the study of children, and critical studies such as Gender Studies. Furthermore, respondents reported being denigrated for their preference for qualitative research methods, resulting for instance in remarks such as "Your research is worthless, you should use quantitative methods" (V18).

Denigration is not just practiced through words however: it may also consist of actions such as paying a person less than her colleagues in similar positions (V2) or providing her with less assistance than colleagues in similar positions (V37); giving non-verbal signals during meetings that connote lack of interest in a certain participant (V7); or withholding certain tasks that are associated with seniority or authority, like the coordination of a Master's programme (e.g. R17). The latter behaviours are also a form of scientific sabotage, because they are directly related to the person's work as a scientist.

Exclusion

A fifth manifestation of harassment is that of exclusion, which can be defined as all behaviours that have the intention and/or effect of making people feel like they do not belong to a particular group. Exclusion can take place on a social level or on a work-related level. The latter, which includes practices such as withholding work-related information, was discussed in the section about scientific sabotage, because it is related directly to a person's work as a scientist. Although exclusion on a social level may have the same effect of hindering a person's work as a scientist, it does not necessarily impact the person's work, and is thus discussed as a separate manifestation of harassment in academia.

Exclusion on a social level may include practices such as ignoring people: refusing to talk with them and/or avoiding eye contact, even if the other person is sitting or standing very close (R4, R11, R15, R16, V2); not taking another person's input, critique or complaints seriously (R10, R11, R12, R15, R18, V2, V7, V15, V30); not showing up at meetings organised by that person (V2); or not responding to requests by that person to make an appointment (R3, R4, R14, V2, V7, V17, V30, V31, V32). Participants also testified how they were socially excluded by being isolated them from their close colleagues, either physically (e.g. by moving to another building, R14) or emotionally (e.g. by saying negative things about those colleagues, by favouring one person over the other, R3, R4, R6, R11, R13, R14, R16, or by prohibiting people from talking with each other, R5, R17, V29); by not being invited for social events such as a Christmas party (V17, V24); or by people only speaking Dutch during an event while knowing that one colleague does not speak Dutch (V2).

Problematising "special needs"

Another manifestation of harassment is problematising needs that are interpreted as "special", such as the needs of those who are pregnant, young/single parents, ill, disabled, or grieving a loss. The experiences of research participants demonstrate that the norm in the academic world is still the able-bodied, healthy, happy, 24/7 available worker (Bleijenbergh, Engen, and Vinkenburg 2012, Herschberg, Benschop, and Van den Brink 2018a).

Research participants who do not match this ideal experienced harassment based on their ascribed deficiency from that norm. Examples mentioned by participants were demands to do work-related tasks during their pregnancy leave (R10, V21); they were bluntly refused (sufficient) time and/or space for expressing milk or received negative remarks about it (R1, V11); were singled out and denied to work on specific days and times (R2, R12) or denied a rescheduling of a job interview because of childbirth (V8). These respondents received negative comments about their conditions (R1, R2, R10, V11, V21) such as "this university suffers financial damage because of your delay" (V11) or "do you know how hard it is to find replacement?" (V21). They felt they were not taken seriously and received undermining questions, for instance whether it was really necessary to stay home after a miscarriage (R16), or whether they were really ill when they called in sick (R10). In some cases, the loyalty of these participants was questioned, for instance through questions about their priorities (R1). In many cases, participants who are regarded as having "special needs" also experience obstruction of their scientific career. Because these obstructions are so directly aimed at a person's career, they have been discussed in the section about scientific sabotage.

H3 | Facilitating factors

In this chapter, we will provide an answer to our third research question:

• What structural and cultural characteristics and developments in the academic system facilitate harassment?

Our data demonstrate that harassment in academia is facilitated by systemic factors, both structural and cultural, that encourage, excuse, trivialise and normalise harassment against women in academia. We will discuss four of these factors: **hierarchies within and outside of academia, the current competitive and individualistic culture of the academic world, inadequate responses to incidents, and self-silencing among victims.** We will also explain that inadequate responses and self-silencing are a consequence of the hierarchies and the competitive, individualistic academic culture. At the same time, inadequate responses and self-silencing reproduce these hierarchies and this competitive, individualistic culture.

Hierarchies within and outside of academia

A first key factor that facilitates harassment are hierarchies, both within and outside of the Academy. These hierarchies consist of several elements, which are discussed in this section.

Organisational authority, dependency and fear

Even though in the Netherlands, the academy is often believed to be relatively equal and informal, research participants experienced large power inequalities, and some people may have significant power over other people's careers. For instance, one participant argued that the academic future of PhD and postdoc researchers depends heavily on their supervisor(s), which causes them to "tolerate behaviour that you wouldn't tolerate otherwise" (R14). Especially people with temporary contracts and people with residence permits based on employment are in a very vulnerable position. With regard to the first group, not just their career but also their financial security depends on their superior, which makes their position highly precarious (see also Herschberg, Benschop, and Van den Brink 2018a). For the second group even more is at stake, namely their residence permit, which may be withdrawn if the holder loses their job. In addition, this group also often lacks a support network which could be consulted in case of harassment, which makes them even more precarious (R14). In such a context, a supervisor becomes extremely powerful. Expressing critique or filing a complaint against someone who is in such a powerful position is hardly ever an option for people experiencing harassment, because they are afraid of their career being damaged (e.g. R14, R17, R18).

Several research participants remembered how this hierarchical dependency was actively used to silence them:

> *"She [the person performing the harassment] had this whole meeting about how important it was that I did not tell anything. [She said:] you do not air your dirty laundry in public, we will resolve this. I know that you are a bit unhappy, but we will resolve it. If you do it [file a complaint], there will be consequences" (R14).*

In several cases, research participants were threatened that they would be fired if they spoke up (e.g. R15, R16, R17), and this was often accompanied by actual actions aimed at firing people or having people fired. According to many participants, this often had the intended effect that people were too afraid to speak up, which was also labelled as a "culture of fear" (angstcultuur).

Academic stardom and strategic alliances

Even if research participants did dare to speak up, hierarchical structures often worked to protect the person performing the harassment, especially if this person was considered a "star": "She had won a huge grant and the department was dying, so the faculty took her side" (R14). A participant who reported her experiences to the confidential advisor was discouraged from filing an official complaint, because "the university would never fire this professor, who brings in so much money and status" (V19). This participant followed the advice, and the professor was never held accountable, protected as she was by her "stardom". As one participant concludes: "It is as if the senior academics are above the law" (R4) (see also National Academies of Sciences 2018).

Moreover, research participants noticed how powerful individuals can easily expand their power by building strategic formal and informal alliances and by hiring "clones" (R16): "Hiring of lecturers has in the past prioritized 'trusted' (yes-saying) personalities, rather than advertising for academic excellence" (V2, also V30 and R16). Through such practices, powerful academics become even more powerful, as they are protected by their formal and informal network. Loyalty is encouraged through the academic emphasis on "excellence" and "stardom", which enables people to "bask in the reflected glory" (Cialdini et al. 1976) of the biggest "star", and encourages people to protect this person rather than challenge him/her. Moreover, loyalty is encouraged through advantages that are provided to people who are part of these alliances, such as authorships and positive evaluations. Formal and informal alliances make powerful individuals even more powerful, and protect them from allegations of harassment.

Participants described how easy it was for superiors to further increase their power by strategically arranging the formal structures in a way that worked in their advantage. This was called "gerrymandering" by one of our respondents (V2), after the US political strategy of manipulating the boundaries of electoral districts so that one party gains an unfair advantage over the other. This respondent witnessed how her superior set up a small management team consisting of three members: himself, a "clone", and a random third person who would never be able to make a change. This made it impossible for her to successfully address practices of harassment performed by this superior.

Definition power and the silencing of critical voices

An important element of organisational power inequalities is "definition power": the power to define the world around you, to decide which issues deserve priority, and to decide how those issues are to be understood and approached. This refers to the power of meaning described by Hardy (1996) and the three-dimensional view of power described by Lukes (2005). It includes the power to define what constitutes harassment, whether harassment is a problem, and whether and how it should be addressed. It also includes the power to reproduce the norm of the healthy, happy and always available worker, which privileges certain employees (e.g. academics without caring responsibilities, able-bodied academics) and disadvantages others, for instance pregnant women and people with disabilities, who become highly vulnerable for harassment.

Furthermore, definition power includes the power to depict critical colleagues as "overly sensitive" or "hysterical", and to dismiss their feedback, ideas and practices as unimportant or non-sensical, as happened in

several of the cases we studied. Finally, definition power also includes the power to define certain disciplines and research areas as superior over others. For instance, respondents working in health sciences reported about physical health science being regarded as more prestigious than psychological health science, and adult health science being regarded as more prestigious than children's health science (e.g. R2). In a similar way, scientists doing theoretical research generally receive more recognition than those doing empirical research, which puts theoretical researchers in a power position (R16), and those who use quantitative methods usually have more power than those who use qualitative methods (e.g. V18).

The stories of research participants make clear how definition power is reinforced by the silencing of critical voices: "If you want to be successful, you have to [...] cooperate, be loyal, not ask any questions", says one research participant (R8). Another participant provides a similar analysis:

> "A lot of the above [experiences with multiple manifestations of harassment] has happened because I'm very critical: I do not let other people tell me what to do. I speak up if I disagree. I stand out from the crowd, and I'm being cut down for that. Many of the professors I met are extremely authoritarian, and have difficulties dealing with criticism" (V35).

Several research participants were sabotaged, fired or pushed into a "mobility trajectory" after they spoke up about injustices or mistreatments in their department (e.g. R6, R7, R15, V18, V30). For example, a PhD student voiced critique about the hostile and intimidating atmosphere that was created by a senior staff member during PhD meetings, after which this staff member tried to arrange a negative evaluation of her which would result in the termination of her contract (V18).

Participants felt that this was a way to disarm critical employees: "It has to do with privilege. And if you bring that up, disagree with how things are going, you become a threat to those privileges" (V30). This participant also noticed how evaluations of critique were gendered: "Women are expected to be obedient and keep their mouth shut." This was recognized by many other participants, who felt like women had much less space than men to be critical about academic practices, structures and cultures. We will go deeper into the gendered nature of academic hierarchies in the following section. Here, we especially want to emphasise that our data show how hierarchical structures are used to exclude critical voices, and that this exclusion in turn reinforces the definition power of the most powerful academics.

Structural inequalities: gender

Apart from organisational authority, also other power inequalities play a role, namely structural inequalities based on axes of social differentiation such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, ability, citizenship, and geographical background. With gender being an important point of focus for this study, many research participants reflected on gender inequalities. They referred to the overrepresentation of men in the academic top, (unconscious) stereotypes about women, and to the ongoing power of the old boys' network, which serves as a support system that privileges men (see also Van den Brink and Benschop 2014, O'Connor et al. 2015, Bagilhole and Goode 2001).

According to our research participants, this privileged position of men in comparison to women provides men scientists with additional freedom to behave as they wish, without being held accountable. The consequence of this is not only that men may be able to get away with harassment more easily, especially if their target is a woman, but also that women feel intimidated and do not dare to address misbehaviour:

"I remember coming to those meetings, discussing my situation [of experiencing harassment], and I did feel intimidated. It was like big rooms and you know, those important men in suits with ties, and me. And I did not feel supported at all. … They were sitting very, very straight. They were like, not really like you know, involved in the conversation. They were very straight. They always put something between us [and sat] a little bit sideways. … If there had been more diversity, I think the whole atmosphere would be less intimidating" (R14).

Moreover, women's underprivileged position makes women academics more vulnerable for experiencing harassment. Several research participants explained for instance how they were sabotaged by not receiving the same opportunities as their male colleagues:

"My male colleagues already supervised three PhD students in their second year of the Tenure Track. I was given the chance to supervise one PhD student during my five years as a Tenure Tracker. The number of PhD students supervised and successfully finalized is a core criterion of being promoted to Full Professor. So is the number and quality of publications. It becomes immediately obvious how debilitating scientific harassment is: […] not only do I have the pure numbers in PhD supervision against me, […] but in addition, I miss the publications coming forth from PhD student supervision. I thus have to spend a lot of my resources on acquiring external money to get myself PhD students." (V33).

Research participants noted how also other types of harassment were specifically targeted at women, with people saying and doing things to them which they would not say or do to a man. According to these participants, gender stereotypes played a role in this: women are expected to be quiet and "just go with the flow", rather than to act independently, stand up for themselves and try to build a career (e.g. R8, R9, R11, V30, V37): "You're only allowed to lay on your back: 'Help me, help me, thank you so much for saving me!'" (R11). Research participants felt that these stereotypes of the passive, obedient, subaltern woman limited the ways in which they were "allowed" to do their work, so that any independent, critical or ambitious action easily resulted in negative reactions and harassment.

For instance, the research participant quoted above did not comply with the expectation to "lay on her back and wait for help." She explains how because of that, she was dismissed for being "bitchy": "I was called bitchy. But I'm not bitchy, I'm professional and passionate about my work, and I'm ambitious. […] If I were a man, I would have been regarded as someone who takes his job seriously" (R11). Because of this labelling of her being a "bitch" however, her complaints about a manager's practices of harassment were not taken seriously: "The dean said that we shouldn't take it so seriously, that this manager was just a little bit afraid of me." Another participant's complaints were also not taken seriously because of a very gender-specific interpretation of her behaviour:

"Men who express criticism are evaluated differently [than women]. My male colleague […] once became very angry. He even called his supervisor. And that supervisor called me to tell me that this colleague did not agree on something and was angry. […] No big deal was made about his anger. But when I react angry, I am that dramatical, overreacting woman" (R17).

According to research participants, gender stereotypes thus negatively influence norms about how women academics are supposed to behave, as well as interpretations of and responses to their behaviour, including their complaints about harassment.

These stereotypical expectations seem to play an even bigger role when women become mothers. One research participant explains how her becoming a mother thoroughly changed the way she was treated:

"I feel that the fact that I'm a woman influences how much I'm allowed to grow in my work. I hate to say this, because it feels like I'm making up an excuse. […] But since [I've become a mother], I do see: you hardly get any support. And I don't need anybody holding my hand, but I would like some support with getting my career back on track. But that did not happen. […] Instead, they started questioning my loyalty, my career, my ambitions. [The manager's remarks and questions] show that he has this image of me, this stigma of the working mother who can't do anything but administrative work. It's not that I look down upon administrative work, but this does mean that I'm not allowed to participate in academic discussions, that I will never be given the opportunity to write a grant application" (R1).

For this and other research participants, the stigma and stereotypes related to motherhood influenced other people's expectations of them, which resulted in scientific sabotage and other manifestations of harassment such as denigration. Ironically enough, the negative effects of this harassment were then blamed on their motherhood, reinforcing once more the stigma of motherhood. Participants pointed out that male colleagues who became fathers were treated completely different, and did not face similar practices of harassment (e.g. V15).

The intersection of organisational authority and gender especially privileges men scientists who are in a position of organisational authority (e.g. professor). This is not to say that these scientists are the only possible perpetrators however, or that women with little authority are the only possible victims. As was already argued in the theoretical chapter, both power and harassment work in more complex and contradictory ways. For instance, respondents witnessed men being victimised as well, and our data demonstrate that also women with a high level of organisational authority can experience harassment. One participant explains how this can be an even bigger challenge: "Maybe it is even harder for me as a professor, compared to if I had been more junior. Because for others, it may be hard to believe that someone is being emotionally abused by someone equal in power" (R4).

Moreover, alleged performers of harassment in our research were not always powerful men. In about one fifth of the cases they were women, and in about one fifth of the cases they were less/equally powerful colleagues (see tables 4 and 5). This indicates that it is important to avoid stereotypes in relation to harassment. It does not mean however that hierarchical structures are not important: both our quantitative and our qualitative analysis demonstrates that these structures protect specific groups and make others especially vulnerable. Moreover, also in non-stereotypical cases, the same inequalities can play a role as those that play a role in more stereotypical cases. For instance, women who reported being harassed by another woman sometimes referred to the concept of the "queen bee", a term used to describe women who achieve career success by derogating other women (Derks et al. 2011): "My husband said: she is a queen bee, somebody who gets all the recognition and all the attention, and she will not accept you standing in her sunlight" (R5). Even though in these stories the person performing the harassment is a woman and not a man, her "queen bee" behaviour is still encouraged by a culture in which only a limited number of places are available for women, which encourages competition, envy and harassment between women scientists (Derks et al. 2011).

Structural inequalities: multiple intersections

The intersections between organisational authority and gender are further complicated by their intersection with other axes of social difference such as ethnicity, age, sexuality, ability, citizenship, and geographical background. Like in the case of gender, belonging to a social minority makes people more vulnerable for victimisation; and belonging to a majority is a factor that facilitates harassing behaviours. For instance, a research participant experienced denigration and defamation in which the other person explicitly referred to her position as an ethnic minority woman, and insinuated that because of that, she would never be a "real scientist" (R15); an experience that was recognised by other participants of colour (e.g. V12, V27, V37). A white research participant who was very critical about gender inequalities admits: "I would never label myself as a racist, but I do notice sometimes that I do have a certain bias towards others: women wearing a scarf, or a man wearing a turban" (R17). This participant thus belongs to a social minority in terms of gender, but to a majority in terms of ethnicity, resulting in a rather specific power position.

Our findings thus reveal that several axes of inequality may intersect in different ways with different results. While these findings nuance the stereotype of (white, Dutch, able-bodied, older) men professors harassing (black, foreign, disabled, young) women PhD students, our study does confirm that some groups are more vulnerable than others for experiencing harassment, and that others receive more protection when performing harassment.

A competitive and individualistic culture

A second key factor that emerged from our data is the competitive, individualistic culture that characterises current academic culture. As one respondent explains: "Universities are given a lot of responsibilities and very little support. Continuous budget cuts, […] very little liberty, which creates an atmosphere of a rat race" (R14). Central to this "rat race" is the competition between researchers for "winning" the scarce positions and grants that are available. Selection and evaluation are increasingly based on a limited set of performance indicators that are allegedly (but not truly) "neutral" and "objective", such as productivity, peer review, citation indexes, internationally refereed publications, and membership of editorial boards (Van den Brink and Benschop 2012, Bol, de Vaan, and Van de Rijt 2018).

Research participants testified how this culture resulted not only in pressure to "perform", but also in competition and jealousy among colleagues which encourages harassing behaviours, especially scientific sabotage (e.g. R2, R4, R5, R6, R15, R17, R18, V3):

> "[My colleague] had taken on a postdoc student in an area in which he had little to no expertise and the postdoc student wished to organise a workshop. […] A special issue was meant to come of this workshop, and my colleague asked me to help this student […]. I agreed to co-edit the issue with the student assisting me. The student vanished fairly early on in the process and what followed was an extensive period of serious editing. […] When the special issue came out, I discovered that I was credited as second co-editor and the professor was credited as first co-editor, while he had done no work on the issue. He […] said that he had done it because he wanted to be able to apply for funding contracts. […] He seemed slightly embarrassed about it" (V3).

This story demonstrates how the current culture of competition and individualism encourages forms of scientific sabotage that even the alleged perpetrators may experience as embarrassing.

Another participant remembers not being encouraged by her supervisor to publish the findings from her PhD research, which she believes to be related to her supervisor feeling threatened:

> "[As a PhD student,] you become a competitor for your supervisor […] because there is so little money, so few positions. Only few people reach the top. […] My supervisor held two positions as a professor, and did not want to give up either of them" (R2).

Yet another research participant recalls how the harassing behaviours of her colleague intensified when she was promoted to professor before him (R18). These and other research participants (e.g. R5, R15) stated that the harassment started or intensified when they became more successful, or when they started to claim (formal) recognition for their success, and therefore became more "threatening" to their colleagues and superiors.

The competitive culture of the academy also facilitates "divide and conquer" practices. Many research participants noticed how colleagues were set up against each other, which created an unwelcoming and sometimes even hostile environment (e.g. R3, R4, R5, R6, R11, R13, R14, R16, V29, V30). One participant described for instance how "the oldies" and "the young ones" were played off against each other, with the older staff members being portrayed as a burden: "He identified with the younger staff members, and told them that their time would come if those old losers were gone" (R11). Another participant explains how her supervisor picked "favourites" and "least favourites", and made people choose between these camps (R14). Several participants thus recounted the formation of different "parties", accompanied by pressure to take sides. This facilitates harassment in that it creates a hostile atmosphere in which harassing behaviours are normalised, and in that it prevents employees from presenting a united front against practices of harassment.

Several research participants pointed out an additional characteristic of this competitive and individualistic culture, namely a general lack of "care": of interest, attention, involvement, help and support. This concerns rather "basic" forms of care, such as asking people how they are doing and giving them compliments, especially during hard times (R1, R2, R16, R17), sending a colleague a postcard after she had a miscarriage (R16). It also concerns "bigger" forms of care, including for example encouragement to take up certain tasks and jobs (R2). One research participant explains: "In the academic world, at least the one that I'm in, it's all about success. Publications and success. And because of that, there is no room left for empathy" (R1). As this participant argues, even though a lack of care does not necessarily result in harassment, it does contribute to a "cold" and individualistic work environment that facilitates harassment and discourages bystanders from intervening in case of incidents.

According to one respondent, this competitive and individualistic culture of academia is different from the company environment that she worked in:

> "In a company environment, individuals are not as important as in the university, because they are in a team. And if anyone in the team is not doing well, then you all will go down. So, you better learn to live with each other and support each other. […] But at a university, every professor is an individual king or queen" (R15).

By turning employees into competitors that are all participating in the rat race to win the few prestigious positions that are available, the current academic culture encourages jealousy, envy and harassment, in particular the manifestation of harassment that we have labelled scientific sabotage.

Inadequate responses to incidents

Another key factor that facilitates harassment in academia is the inadequate response to incidents, both on an individual and on an institutional level (see also van der Ven 2017b, National Academies of Sciences 2018). In this section, we will describe what types of responses were reported by research participants, and whether these responses were experienced as helpful and satisfying. Moreover, we will analyse how inadequate responses are interwoven with the hierarchical, competitive, individualistic character of academia described above.

Of all 53 research participants, 43 provided explicit information about whether they had tried to find help to change their situation. Of these 43 participants, a large majority (35 participants) had tried to find help, for instance with their supervisor, manager, a confidential advisor, human resources, the integrity committee, a research director, the dean, the faculty board, the rector, the executive board or an external institution such as a law court. They were not positive about the results however:

Table 6. Outcomes of participants' efforts for getting help (n=35).

	n	%
Received no help	21	60%
Received some support, but no (satisfying) solution	10	29%
Received adequate help	1	3%
Awaiting outcomes	3	9%

Even though a large majority of research participants tried to find help, only one of these efforts was actually successful (and some were still awaiting the outcomes). In this one successful case (V28), the respondent's interim manager was replaced. This opened the road back to the department for this respondent through a period of mediation and assessment outside the department, finally resulting in that her dismissal was cancelled. Such an outcome was extremely rare however: over half of help-seeking participants received no help at all, and almost a third received a friendly and supportive reaction, but were not offered a satisfying solution.

Research participants who received little or no help described several types of responses which were not helpful for them. Many participants felt like the other person did not believe them: "It was like I had to prove that I'm not stupid, that I'm not hysterical. They [the people I turned to for help] were like: but, are you sure? Are you not imagining things?" (R14). Another participant received the following response from her director and colleagues: "According to them, it was utter nonsense. [They said:] 'That doesn't happen here'" (R16). This research participant felt like she was not taken seriously, based on the belief that harassment did not happen in that organisation. Our findings suggest that harassment can take place in every academic institution however, and within every discipline: participants who mentioned where their experiences had happened, named 13 different institutions and a wide variety of disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and medical sciences.

In other cases, the other person did believe our research participant, but did not offer any help:

"It was made into my individual problem. The dean said: 'If you want to change something, you'll have to talk to him.' I said that I didn't dare to do that, because I didn't feel safe, but the dean insisted: 'You'll have to, if you want to move on.' So that was where it ended for me. […] It feels like you have to be raped here before they undertake any action. I feel that what happened to me doesn't really count" (R1).

In this case, where a respondent experienced amongst others verbal threats, denigration, and scientific sabotage, the dean placed all responsibility for solving the problem with our research participant, thereby individualising and trivialising the issue, and not taking any responsibility for solving the problem.

Some participants were actively discouraged from filing a complaint, and/or instructed to stay silent in order to "keep the peace" (e.g. R15, R17, R18, V37). In one case for instance, the dean agreed with our research participant about her supervisor's misconduct, but didn't undertake any action:

"Our dean is very kind, but I wish he was a bit stricter. Because in my case, he disagrees [with the professor performing the harassment], but [apparently] he still thinks: 'I want to preserve my relationship with that professor, so that relationship will be my priority' (R17).

As one participant concludes: "Peace (rust), no matter on what terms, has become a value in itself, as if any disagreement has ever improved by not talking about it" (V2).

The emphasis on "order", "rest" and "peace" not only denies the seriousness of experiences with harassment, it also implicates that people who speak up about it are "trouble makers" or "difficult persons"; an accusation that was voiced explicitly vis-a-vis several research participants (e.g. V2, V7, V21, V30). One participant was warned that going to the dean might damage her own career (V6). Through such an interpretation, the problem of harassment is being redefined, and the victim rather than the person performing the harassment becomes the problem. Such a definition of harassment protects harassers while silencing and disarming victims.

In some cases, participants were even forced to sign a formal non-disclosure agreement, stating that they would not say anything negative about the person harassing them. Such an agreement can seriously limit the possibilities for undertaking action:

"I know that I'm not the only one [who is harassed by that person]. Many women left the department because of problems. […] So, I thought: I would like to get in touch with these women, and maybe we can file a complaint together. But […] that would violate the agreements. […] So that makes it very hard for me to file a complaint" (R7).

Through non-disclosure "agreements", people are thus effectively silenced and prevented from taking any steps against the person(s) performing the harassment.

Sometimes, people were willing but unable to provide help:

> *"I went to the confidential advisor, I went to the medical officer, I went to the head of the research school, I went to the head of the faculty. [...] They said: 'Too bad, but what can we do?' They kept pingponging me around" (R14).*

Especially scientific sabotage seems to be a topic that does not really "belong" anywhere:

> *"I told the confidential advisor about my problem, and she said: 'I understand that this is very disturbing, but I can't help you, because this is not part of our task.' [...] I find it a pity that confidential advisors, at least in our university, focus mostly on sexual intimidation and unambiguous cases of bullying and discrimination, and that you can't go there for issues such as mine [scientific sabotage]" (R17).*

This "pingponging around" of people happened more often, and research participants reported hearing from different people (e.g. confidential advisor, integrity committee, head of department, dean) that it was "not their task" to intervene, indicating that there is no adequate support system in place for victims of different manifestations of harassment.

While this may be interpreted as a practical problem that can easily be solved, our data indicate that more seems to be at stake: even if research participants had somewhere to go, and even if this person was willing to provide a solution, this solution was often experienced as a makeshift measure rather than a structural solution. For instance, participants were offered coaching trajectories (e.g. R18) and sick leave / "time outs" (R14). Such measures, aimed at the victim, do not solve the problem however, because no actions are undertaken to investigate the issue, address any unwanted behaviour and take measures if the alleged perpetrator is found guilty. Investigations and measures were extremely rare, and even if this happened, participants were not always satisfied with the outcome, for example when their harasser was found guilty but was only relocated to another department (R14), or only partly deposed of managerial tasks (R1). This lack of more profound interventions seems to play a role especially when the harasser is a "star", as was already discussed in the previous section, indicating that inadequate responses are fuelled by the hierarchical character of the academy and the interdependencies and (strategic) alliances that are part of it.

Some participants brought their case before court in order to find a solution. As one of these cases makes clear however, even winning a court case may not be the solution that someone is looking for. In this case, the participant won the court case, meaning that she could keep her job. Winning this case was meaningful, she explains: "If you win, you feel human again. It's been very hard and I've been very unhappy, but the moment that you win the case, it's like a cloud disappears in your head" (R6). On the other hand, the case revolved around her keeping her job rather than stopping the bullying, and there were no consequences for the people she considered to be responsible.

It was not just superiors and formal officers who responded in inadequate ways however: bystanders often responded equally inadequate. Burn (2009) has described several barriers why bystanders do not intervene in case of sexual violence: they may not notice that sexual violence is happening; they may not identify the violence as violence; they may not take responsibility (influenced by the presence of other bystanders, by his/her relationship with the victims, and by ideas about whether the victim is "worth" defending); they may lack the skills to intervene; and they may be afraid that intervening is negatively evaluated by their environment. Several of these factors were also mentioned by our research participants, for instance that colleagues were not aware of what was going on, or that they did know about it, but did not recognise it as harassment and sometimes even copied the behaviour:

> *"The women working at the General Office were called worker bees [...] It was the director who did this, but other colleagues laughed about it. So, he was very much stimulated to perpetuate that labelling. [...] Because he is the most senior one, he is allowed to do this. [...] And it trickles all the way down, into our corporate culture. Through this repetition, it is constantly reinforced" (R16).*

In other cases, respondents described how colleagues knew about the harassment, recognised it as such and were supportive, but did not intervene. Their reasons for this require further investigation, but a number of participants were told by colleagues that they were afraid of the consequences ("becoming next" and/or losing their job) if they spoke up: "Nobody says anything about it. Nobody is really independent. Everybody says: I can't speak up, because that would work out detrimental for myself" (V30). Apart from fear, this response also hints at the individualistic culture of present-day academia. In one case, an HR officer seemed to disagree with the dean about having to fire our research participant without a dossier. The HR officer never openly objected however, and later told our participant that "the HR department is there for the employer, not the employee. [...] If she [the dean] announces tomorrow that the HR department is no longer necessary, then I'm unemployed'" (R8). Indeed, such fear of negative consequences is one of the barriers for bystander intervention mentioned by Burn. Another reason for not intervening might be that bystanders lack the skills for intervening.

The inadequate responses discussed in this section are strongly interwoven with the hierarchical, competitive, individualistic character of academia described above. Because of that culture, certain responses become "logical", such as the protection of alleged perpetrators, especially if these are very senior employees or "stars", and the trivialisation of harassment. Other, more adequate responses, such as speaking up about harassment, starting an investigation or firing people in case of serious misconduct, become illogical or practically impossible. Present day academic culture thus facilitates inadequate responses to incidents. Vice versa, these inadequate responses reproduce an academic culture that is hierarchical, competitive and individualistic, and that facilitates harassment.

"Self-silencing" among victims

Another factor that facilitates harassment is that of victim's "self-silencing"; a dynamic that is well known from literature about domestic and sexual violence. Feminist researchers have demonstrated that "self-silencing" is in fact the result of someone not "having the ability, the means, and the right to express oneself, one's mind, and one's will" (Reinharz 1994, 180), a definition that emphasises the socio-cultural and political nature of silence (Ahrens 2006, 263). Indeed, our data demonstrate that research participants decided to remain silent under the influence of the systemic factors described earlier in this chapter.

Many respondents recounted how they did not take their own experiences and emotions seriously, and/or did want to take action to end another person's harassing behaviour. For one respondent, the denigration, exclusion, threats and sabotage which she experienced during her PhD trajectory made her extremely insecure about herself:

> "For the longest period of time I really believed I was the crazy one. … I was completely sure: I'm imagining it. Because she [seemed to be] such a nice person, it cannot be true. It must be me who is stupid and simply cannot cope with the stress, I'm the weak one" (R14, also R2, R13, R17, V19, V28, V31).

This participant, like others, doubted her own judgement of the situation, even though the harassment was rather severe and structural, and judged herself as "weak" and "not worthy" of becoming a scientist. Looking back, she relates this judgement to the current academic culture, which defines academic work as "a struggle" that will only be survived by "the fittest": "I thought it was okay, I thought: this is how PhDs work" (R14). Through such evaluations, victims of harassment become silenced and wait very long to report harassment, if they report at all.

Several respondents did take their own experiences seriously, but still decided not to talk to anybody or file an official complaint (e.g. R7, V18, V27, V30). Sometimes, they made this choice out of fear for the consequences: "I was not scared of immediate reactions, but very afraid that this could hurt my future career. I still am, and that is why I hesitated to share my story" (V27). Another participant reasons in a similar way:

> "If they find out that I've had this conversation with you, then it's over for me. Not just here, but [also in other universities]. We have a diversity officer now, who wants to find out why it's so hard for women to reach the top, but nobody dares to tell her anything. [...] I told her a few things, but not everything I shared with you" (V30).

Others chose not to speak up out of loyalty with the person performing the harassment. One participant says:

> "I think a lot of it is also [...] gratitude. That was the most difficult thing for me to overcome: [...] the fact that she gave us jobs. How can we go and complain about the person who gave me a job when I really, really needed it?" (R14).

Several respondents reported they did not want to "stir trouble" (R14), or that they did not report because that would be "aggravating" for the other person (R18). During the interview, some respondents felt sorry about saying negative things about colleagues, managers, directors and supervisors who had harassed them (e.g. R4). Again, what stands out is how such feelings are facilitated by systemic factors such as academic hierarchies, dependencies, competition and individualism, which can create feelings of being indebted to a particular person for "having been given a chance". Moreover, the reluctance to speak up and cause "trouble" is interwoven with the discourse that defines people who speak up about it as "trouble makers", which defines victims rather than harassers as the cause of the problems.

Furthermore, self-silencing can be related to a fear of not being taken seriously. One participant explained how she did not address the issue because she was afraid that she, rather than the person harassing her, would be regarded as the problem:

> "I did not speak up about it, because I don't know whether it will be used against me; whether it will damage me in the long term and that I will become known as that nagger that can't get along with him" (R1).

Especially reports about more "subtle" or secret forms of harassment were often regarded as unviable:

> "I never went to the confidential advisor, because [...] I thought that the harassment was too inexplicit and too invisible. [...] It very much depends on your own interpretation. And I know exactly how people from my institution feel about interpretation: it doesn't count. You need solid facts" (R16).

Another respondent, who experienced structural sexual harassment, follows a similar line of reasoning: "I never filed a complaint, because I feel like it will not work out. I cannot prove anything, because it's all very subtle, and I don't have any witnesses. [...] I just don't think that it's enough for a committee to judge my complaint as justified" (R7).

Yet another respondent testified how her manager not only committed scientific sabotage against her, but also sexually harassed her PhD student. The PhD student did not dare to speak up however, afraid that she would be accused of "trying to help her professor" (R18). These cases demonstrate that the fear of not being taken seriously is a common reason for people not to report the harassment they are experiencing, especially if there is little evidence and few/no witnesses. As became clear in the previous section, this fear is justified: in many cases, harassment is not taken seriously and/or it is dealt with in a way that is not satisfactory for the person reporting the harassment. This discourages people from speaking up, which in turn reinforces the misconception that harassment in academia is non-existent.

H4 | Effects of harassment

In this chapter, we will provide an answer to the fourth research question:

1. What are the consequences of harassment for individuals, organisations and science in general?

Both harassment itself and the inadequate responses to incidents can have a profound impact on the personal and professional lives of academics. These negative consequences concern not just individual employees, departments and organisations, but also science in general.

Feeling unwelcome, excluded and unsafe

The vast majority of research about the effects of workplace harassment and bullying relies on quantitative methods (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018), and does not provide much insight into how harassment is experienced and interpreted by research participants. What stood out in our research was how practices of harassment resulted in research participants feeling unwelcome, excluded and, sometimes, unsafe at their workplace. One participant explains:

> *"Four men colleagues asked me (at different occasions): 'Did you get this position because you are a woman?' I was surprised that people still think this way, and even more surprised that they said it out loud. […] It makes you wonder: if four colleagues dare to ask this question, how many others are thinking the same thing? […] Also, in the second week of my employment, my supervisor advised me not to get pregnant. […] I reported both incidents with the manager, but he told me to just ignore it. […] These may be relatively small things, but they make me feel very unwelcome, and I'm not sure whether the academic world is the right place for me" (V15).*

Another participant reports a similar effect: "Only gradually I started to realise that I felt systematically excluded from the department. […] Even now that I write this, I notice how much it hurts. […] It were dark times and I almost left the academy, even though I love science and love to inspire students" (V17). Because of their colleagues' unsupportive and sometimes even hostile behaviours, these participants did not feel welcome and seriously considered leaving the academy, as were many other participants (e.g. R13, V17, V19, V29, V33, V35, V36); an effect that has also been described in previous research (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018, 75).

Moreover, several participants reported feeling unsafe (R1, R7, R16, V14, V18, V19):

> *"I'm in a very vulnerable position as a PhD student, because I still have to prove myself. And now that I've experienced how professor A and B, who are in position of power, are able to break all the rules and sabotage my project without any reasons concerning the content, or without any arguments to counter other people's positive evaluations, I feel unsafe at work every single day" (V18).*

Participants describe being in a constant state of stress: "For twenty years, I felt unsafe. […] It was always possible to unexpectedly run into him, and receive some kind of remark, so you had to be in adrenaline-mode immediately […], be alert all the time" (R16). One participant started bringing large piles of paper work to every meeting with her supervisor, afraid that she might say or do something "wrong", which she knew would result in an aggressive reaction of her supervisor. Other participants even experience physical panic responses (trembling, heart palpitations) when seeing the person performing the harassment (R7, V37). Such responses have also been described in research about domestic violence, where victims report similar signs of distress (Lo Fo Wong 2006).

Participants indicated that also their colleagues felt unsafe, even when they were not directly targeted: "I share my story with you not just to report about my own experiences, but also to make clear that harassment can impact a large group of people, an entire department. It makes an entire department vulnerable" (V17). Another respondent explains: "I noticed that my colleagues are afraid. They don't dare to say anything. In meetings, they remain silent, afraid that something they say will be interpreted as criticism" (R17, also R11). According to research participants, harassment thus had an impact not just on themselves as targets, but also on their colleagues who were bystanders (see also Misawa 2015).

Psychological and physical problems

Many research participants suffered from psychological and physical problems, which they felt were related to the harassment they experienced. Such a causal relation between workplace harassment and health disorders is supported by the extensive body of quantitative research. In their recent "overview of reviews" about this literature, Nielsen and Einarsen (2018) describe how studies have convincingly demonstrated a relation between workplace bullying and mental and physical health, with studies suggesting correlations and/or causal relations between bullying and health problems such as post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression, anxiety, headache, chronic neck pain, fibromyalgia, sleep difficulties, work related strain, and even suicidal ideation.

Indeed, research participants reported feeling exhausted (R1), stressed (e.g. R5, R7, R11, R13, V29, V35), tired (R9), unhappy (R6), clinically depressed (R14), desperate (V28) and in shock (V37) because of the harassment. Moreover, respondents reported having panic attacks (R14) and insecurity issues: "Within months, I was reduced to a scared, insecure little bird" (V28, also R2, R13, R14, R17, V19, V31). Also sleeping difficulties were common: "I felt desperate, used, and dumped like trash. […] Whatever I did, they always found something wrong about it. […] I started sleeping worse and worse" (V28, also R13). Several participants were diagnosed with burn-out (R9, R14, V1, V19, V28, V35). One respondent indicated that she was able to do the interview only because of the medication she took: "For weeks and weeks, I just cried. Now that I have anti-depressants, I feel better. That is how I'm able to talk about it with you" (V37).

Participants described how these psychological problems sometimes resulted in physical problems: "At some point, I was hospitalised because of cardiac arrhythmia. I believe that this was caused by all the stress I felt because of the harassment" (R5, also V29). One respondent experienced so much stress and sleeping problems that she passed out after a meeting:

> "After that meeting, I was so tired that I just passed out and fell. People told me that I had been 'out' for some time, and woke up but didn't remember anything, not even which day of the week it was" (R13).

Other respondents reported hypertension (R8), stomach problems (R14, R16) and chronic pain (R15). Again, respondents indicated that also their colleagues suffered from health issues, even when they were not targeted directly: "All my colleagues felt very bad about it. We were in a very bad shape, physically, we were just stressed out" (R11).

Negative effects on personal relations

For several respondents, the harassment as well as the physical and psychological consequences had negative effects on their personal and/or professional lives and careers. Although the effects on personal lives have not yet received much attention in existing literature (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018), several research participants described how the harassment had a profound impact on their personal lives. For instance, one respondent wanted to have a child, but did not dare to become pregnant because of her precarious situation:

> "We were looking at the possibility [of having children], but we decided it was too insecure. We actually made an active choice against it at the time. […] My university was so unsupportive. […] I felt like I was not important, they just wanted me out. They wanted me out, because when I'm out, the problem is out. […] This was not a situation to start a family. But I regret that, I regret it a lot" (R14).

Other respondents explained how the stress negatively impacted their personal relationships with their partners and/or children (e.g. R1, R5, R16).

Productivity, creativity and motivation problems

Respondents also experienced negative effects on their professional lives. While only few studies have investigated the effect of harassment on productivity, which makes it hard to make any statistically valid claims about this effect (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018, Nielsen and Einarsen 2012), many research participants felt that the harassment negatively impacted the quality and quantity of the work they delivered (e.g. R8, R9, R13, R14, R15, V1, V18, V28, V30, V32, V33, V35). One respondent explains:

> *"When you receive another letter or e-mail [concerning the harassment], it takes all your attention. Even at night, you lie awake, thinking: how can I respond? That costs an incredible amount of time and energy. […] Energy that could have been spent in a different way. I spent way too little time om my research and teaching" (R8).*

One respondent remembers becoming forgetful: "I had to give a lecture, but when I arrived, I realised that I had forgotten to prepare any slides. That's when I realised: okay, so that is how stressed out I am" (R13). Several respondents recounted how their motivation and creativity were compromised because of the harassment (e.g. R15, V18, V30). For instance, one of them says: "Science is a creative process, and that doesn't work when you feel threatened" (V30, also R15). Others ended up on sick leave (see also Nielsen and Einarsen 2018), and were not able to do their work at all (R9, R14, V1, V28, V35).

An effect of harassment that has remained largely invisible in previous research is that of damaged and devastated careers. A considerable number of research participants reported this effect, however. For example, several research participants experienced delay in being promoted, either because the harassment took up the time and energy they needed for obtaining the promotion, or because the harassment was directly aimed at sabotaging that promotion (e.g. R9, R10, R16, R17, V1, V20, V23, V29, V33).

Negative effects on organisations and science in general

Our analysis confirms previous studies stating that both the harassment itself and its consequences can have severe consequences not only for individuals, but also for organisations, and it may compromise scientific quality (Misawa 2015, Miller et al. 2019, Nielsen and Einarsen 2018, Marín-Spiotta 2017). First of all, academics who experience harassment as well as their colleagues may not perform optimally, and talented scientists may "drop out" temporarily or permanently. For some participants, both junior and senior, the harassment resulted in them leaving or being forced to leave a certain field, department, university, or the Academy (e.g. R2, R7, R8, R14, R15, R16, V29, V36), or they strongly consider such a move (R13, V19, V29, V33, V35, V36). One participant who experienced gender-based harassment, explains:

> *"I even considered stopping my career, not because I doubt that I will make it, but because it feels like working in a kindergarten with bullying children throwing very subtle temper tantrums. I consider these practices as so beneath adult scientists, that I am actually feeling ashamed on my male colleagues' behalf, including my supervisor and dean. It's a waste of my time" (V33).*

Often, these academics are passionate about science: "I don't know what my future looks like, and whether it lies in the Academy. Even though I'm a scientist at heart, I don't know whether the Academy is the right place for me" (V35). Those who are able to perform optimally, may not be acknowledged as such, so that their valuable work becomes less visible.

Second, our study has shown that minority groups (women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, etcetera) are more vulnerable for experiencing harassment than majority groups, which means that they also disproportionally suffer the consequences. This frustrates efforts to make the Academy more diverse and compromises scientific quality (Page 2017, Freeman and Huang 2014, Campbell et al. 2013, Ahmed 2012). Moreover, both the harassment itself and its trivialisation and normalisation contribute to a culture where only specific personalities can flourish. As one participant states: "Those who remain are the alpha-people and the assertive types" (V30). This means that the Academy becomes a place that is unwelcoming or even hostile not only to social minority groups, but also to people who place high value on teamwork and care. This reinforces current cultures and structures, which in turn facilitate harassment, thus resulting in a vicious circle of decreasing scientific quality.

H5 | Conclusions and recommendations

In this final chapter, we will summarise our answer to the research questions, and reflect on the final research question:

• What are promising suggestions for limiting negative consequences and for preventing harassment in academia?

Conclusions

In this report, we presented the outcomes of the first Dutch national explorative study about the different manifestations of harassment experienced by women academics. For this study, we conducted 20 in-depth interviews and collected 33 written testimonials about women academics' own experiences with harassment. We took research participants' interpretations and evaluations of incidents as our starting point, meaning that this report represents our analysis of these women's voices.

Even though participants were sometimes reluctant to label their experiences as harassment, as has also been pointed out in earlier studies (McDonald 2012, Clodfelter et al. 2010, Magley and Shupe 2005, Littleton, Axsom, and Yoder 2006, Ilies et al. 2003), their experiences all fell under our definition of harassment as "patterns of intense behaviour that have the aim and/or effect of violating a person's dignity and/or that create a hostile working environment, thereby obstructing scholars in their academic work and their career progress." Based on our analysis of the experiences of 53 women academics, we conclude (1) that women academics experience different manifestations of harassment, (2) that this harassment is facilitated by cultural and structural factors, and (3) that harassment can have detrimental effects on individuals, organisations and science in general.

Manifestations of harassment in academia

While previous studies often focused on certain manifestations of harassment such as (long-term, psychological) bullying (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018) or sexual harassment (National Academies of Sciences 2018), we used "harassment" as an overarching term that encompasses both single incidents and more structural behaviours, and that includes psychological, physical and sexual behaviours. This approach enabled us to distinguish six different manifestations of harassment in academia: scientific sabotage, sexual harassment, physical and verbal threats, denigration, exclusion, and problematising "special needs". While the latter manifestations (especially sexual intimidation) have also been described in relation to other sectors such as the corporate sector, the manifestation that we labelled as "scientific sabotage" includes behaviours that are more specific to the academic world. These are: making someone invisible (e.g. by denying authorship), refusing to promote someone (e.g. by cancelling a chair), blocking access to spaces, documents, objects or information (e.g. to the laboratory), labelling people as incompetent vis-à-vis colleagues (e.g. vis-à-vis selection committees), and physically or financially destroying a person's research project (e.g. destroying research data).

It became clear that all these different manifestations of harassment are interconnected, and victims often experience multiple types of harassing behaviours at the same time. The harassment experienced by participants seldom concerned a single, isolated incident. In most cases, it was structural and lasted for months, years or sometimes even decades. While our research is qualitative rather than quantitative, a quantitative analysis of the persons perpetrating the harassment shows that a large majority of the harassment was performed by superiors rather than colleagues, and by men rather than women.

Facilitating factors

Our study points out that harassment in academia is facilitated by at least four structural and cultural factors. These are: hierarchies within and outside of academia, the competitive and individualistic culture of contemporary academia, inadequate responses to incidents and "self-silencing" among victims.

With regard to the first two factors, research participants' stories depict a grim image of an academic world whose inhabitants are competitors rather than colleagues, participating in a relentless rat-race to the academic top that reproduces the narrow ideal of the "happy, healthy, always available academic", and where "winners" become "academic stars" who enjoy a lot of leeway while "losers" are evaluated as "weak" and "incompetent". This hierarchical, competitive and individualistic culture facilitates harassment, in particular against less powerful groups, such as junior academics with little organisational authority and academics from socially marginalised groups such as women.

The third factor concerns the inadequate responses from bystanders, supervisors and academic leaders. Research participants' stories indicate that bystanders and leaders did not believe victims, trivialised their experiences, and/or denied them support and intervention. The majority of the participants reported they received no support and were made responsible for solving the issue. They were advised to keep silent or confront their harassers themselves, while management remained unable and/or unwilling to intervene. This lack of intervention on the part of managers protects harassers and silences victims.

The fourth factor of research participants remaining silent could often be related to cultural and structural factors such as the idea of academic work as a "struggle" and academics as "fighters"; the marginalisation of victims; and power inequalities. Both "self-silencing" among victims and inadequate responses to incidents reproduce current hierarchical, competitive and individualistic academic cultures and structures, and contribute to an environment where harassment is normalised.

Effects of harassment

Our study contributes to previous, mostly quantitative, literature on the effects of workplace harassment (for an overview, see for instance Nielsen and Einarsen 2018), in demonstrating how deeply harassment impacts both victims' personal lives as well as their professional lives and careers and science in general. Research participants reported feeling unwelcome, excluded and unsafe at their workplace because of the harassment. Moreover, they reported physical and psychological consequences ranging from chronic pain to cardiac arrhythmia, and from anxiety to burnout and depression. Several research participants reported having to use medication in order to be able to cope with (the consequences of) the harassment. In addition, they reported negative effects on their personal relations, and problems with productivity, creativity and motivation. Our analysis thus shows that harassment and its consequences may have a profound impact on people's personal and professional lives. In some cases, people were no longer able to continue working in academia.

Victims of all manifestations of harassment and their colleagues often spend a considerable amount of time and energy "surviving" and/or improving the situation; time and energy they would otherwise have spent on their academic work. This means that harassment in academia negatively influences individual, personal lives, but also organisations and science in general. Victims and their colleagues may not be able to deliver the work that they could have delivered under safer working conditions. Moreover, academia is losing talented academics because of harassment. Considering that especially marginalised groups such as women and other minorities are vulnerable to victimisation, harassment impedes efforts within academia to create a more diverse workforce and thus compromises academic quality.

Recommendations

In this section, we describe some of the most promising suggestions for limiting negative consequences and for preventing harassment in academia. Based on our analysis, we suggest interventions at different levels. Interventions may be embedded within current initiatives for improving social safety and inclusion at academic institutions.

Creating awareness: knowledge, attitudes, skills

Our study reveals an inconvenient truth: harassment in academia happens, it is related to cultural and structural factors, and it can have detrimental consequences. While it may be inconvenient, it is also a truth that must be acknowledged if the academy is to become a truly safe and inclusive space for all academics.

Therefore, our first recommendation is to break the silence and to create awareness about the issue of harassment in academia within all levels of the organisation. An intrinsic part of this is the dissemination of knowledge about the different manifestations of harassment, the factors that facilitate harassment and the effects of harassment. This also includes knowledge about larger structures of inequality such as gender and other axes of social differentiation.

Preventing harassment requires not just knowledge, but also certain attitudes and skills. This means that interventions for prevention should provide cognitive information, as well as create constructive attitudes and teach academics certain skills. It is crucial to address academics with regard to all the roles they may have in relation to harassment: that of victim, bystander and harasser. This means that academics should become educated not just about what to do if they fall victim to harassment, but also about how to intervene as a bystander, and about how not to become a harasser. Especially the latter requires high levels of critical self-reflection, because some behaviours may not be labelled as harassment by the person performing them, while they may be experienced as such by others.

Integrating prevention activities in existing structures seems a promising way to ensure structural attention for the topic. Practical suggestions are the integration of interventions against harassment in courses for early career researchers and especially in leadership programs for academic staff, managers, directors, heads of department, deans and rectors. Preventing and dealing with harassment, managing conflicts, and responding to incidents should be a central element of training programmes for academic leaders. In addition, the debate on harassment in academia can be spurred by workshops, panel discussions or theatre shows about the topic (e.g. "#Metoo academia: The learning curve", a theatre show about sexual intimidation in the academic world initiated by the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH), expanded by the Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities (EGSH), and performed by "Het Acteursgenootschap").

Creating support structures

Responding to incidents in a constructive manner not only helps to limit the damage in case of an incident, but it also encourages people to speak up. One basic element that facilitates adequate responses to incidents is the existence of codes of behaviour, but our research has made clear that this is not enough. These codes of behaviour must also be enforced, and if a person does not abide by the rules, there must be consequences. This is in the first place a task for academic institutions themselves; they should have support structures that actively protect people who experience harassment, provide sufficient psychological support, and intervene in case of incidents.

While academic institutions often refer victims to confidential officers, it became clear in our study that according to research participants, these officers are not always appointed for all manifestations of harassment, do not always have the necessary skills to respond to incidents, are not always independent, and/or do not have the power to intervene (see also Herfs and Teppema 2014). We recommend (structural) schooling for these professionals on the topic of harassment: its manifestations, facilitating factors, and effects.

The appointment of confidential officers is necessary but not sufficient; a structure should be created in each academic institution that has the knowledge and power to intervene in cases of harassment. The engagement of academic leaders actively following up on decisions by protecting victims and holding harassers accountable for their behaviour is indispensable to create an effective structure against harassment.

Even with such a structure in place and leaders involved at each institution, some cases may require an "outsider" that is independent from the institutions. This may be an independent national academic body where victims and bystanders can go for advice, investigation and intervention in case of inadequate responses within their institution. This independent body must have enough power and esteem to rule and apply sanctions in more "extreme" cases. The institutional location of this body is crucial, for this body to be able to act legitimately and independent from any academic institution. A partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science could be investigated.

Creating a culture of care

Since facilitating factors of harassment are the current hierarchical, competitive and individualistic culture and structures of academia, these are also starting points for change. A promising route that was suggested by several research participants is the creation of a "culture of care", where people are encouraged to help and support each other and work together as a team, and where diversity and inclusion are the standard rather than the exception. We expect there to be "good practices", research groups that can serve as a source of inspiration and a starting point for organisational change in other institutions, and therefore recommend an inventory of these practices, as well as dissemination of the outcomes.

In order to encourage academic institutions to strive for such a cultural change, we recommend the inclusion of "workplace climate" in present accreditation procedures. Currently, these accreditation procedures focus especially on the quality of research and teaching. This could be extended with questions regarding workplace climate, including questions regarding the prevalence and prevention of different manifestations of harassment, questions about the level of diversity/inclusion and measures to increase these, and questions about workload/stress and measures to diminish these. We are aware that this requires a considerable effort from all the parties involved, but we are convinced that the nature of the problem justifies this effort.

Future research

A final recommendation concerns future research. Based on our study, we recommend at least three types of research that are needed to gain a better understanding of harassment in academia: (1) qualitative case studies, (2) quantitative/qualitative research about harassment among specific groups, and (3) quantitative research about the prevalence and effects of harassment in academia.

In the present study, we focused on victims' perspectives. This provided us with valuable insights about how harassment is experienced by those who are targeted, but it did not allow for an analysis of all the dynamics and complexities involved in harassment cases. Our study indicates that bystanders, direct supervisors, academic leaders and actors such as the confidential advisors and HRM departments play a crucial role, but their perspectives, motives and actions were not part of this study. In order to be able to understand and tackle the issue in a more comprehensive way, more knowledge is needed about all the dynamics that play a role in cases of harassment: the perspectives and motives of the different actors involved and their interplay; the interactions between the different actors and their outcomes; and the choices made and their impact. Understanding such dynamics and motives is necessary for the development of interventions aimed at preventing and dealing with harassment in academia.

Secondly, we recommend additional quantitative and qualitative research among other minority groups such as queer academics, academics of colour, disabled academics, young academics, academics with temporary contracts and academics without a residence permit. Literature indicates that these academics are more vulnerable than others for experiencing harassment (e.g. National Academies of Sciences 2018, Clancy et al. 2017, McFadden and Crowley-Henry 2016, Williams 2014). Moreover, they may experience specific manifestations of harassment, which may not all be included in this report. We also recommend research about men academics' experiences with harassment, as their experiences may differ from women's experiences. For instance, research about domestic and sexual violence against men has revealed that these men suffer from a lack of recognition, making it harder for victims to recognise and acknowledge their own experiences with violence, as well as to find help (Wallace et al. 2018, Sable et al. 2006). Future research should investigate whether this is also the case in relation to the different manifestations of harassment against men in academia. In any case, the analysis of gender and harassment can benefit from a wider group of respondents.

Thirdly, while the present study provides qualitative insight into the different manifestations, facilitating factors and effects of harassment, it provides no quantitative insights about how common certain practices and patterns are. In order to facilitate an adequate response to the problem of harassment, additional statistical information is required about the prevalence of different types of harassment, characteristics of victims and harassers, the consequences of harassment, and whether victims receive adequate support. Collecting this information longitudinally enables to discern developments and to assess the effectiveness of certain measures. Moreover, it allows for benchmarks that encourage institutions to take their responsibility.

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