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Duke University Press Durham and London 2024

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Bird Williams | Designed by Aimee C. Harrison
Typeset in Untitled Serif by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Doyle, Jennifer, author.
Title: Shadow of my shadow / Jennifer Doyle.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2024. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2023042685 (print)
LCCN 2023042686 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478030669 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478026426 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478059707 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Doyle, Jennifer. | Nassar, Larry—Trials, litigation, etc. | Ferrante, Elena. Amica geniale—Criticism, Textual. | Sexual harassment. | Stalking victims. | Sexual harassment in education—United States. | Sexual harassment in sports—United States. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Feminism & Feminist Theory | EDUCATION / Schools / Levels / Higher
Classification: LCC HD6060.3 . D68 2024 (print) | LCC HD6060.3 (ebook) | DDC 331.4/133—dc23/eng/20240501
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023042685
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023042686

Cover art: Aimee Goguen, stills from *cloud and shadow animation*. Courtesy of the artist.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A FEW CLOSE FRIENDS MADE significant contributions to this book's development. I would not have been able to take up harassment as a subject in my work were it not for years of conversation with John Andrews, Kathleen McHugh, and Jasbir Puar. Dominic Johnson coached me through my writing about Adrian Howells and heard quite early versions of this work over the years. Sarah Miller lent her significant editorial expertise to the writing of "A Pain in the Neck." I am particularly grateful to Hedi El Kholti, who encouraged me to take up these subjects and published *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, which is, in many ways, this book's companion.

When we go through things, many of our friends go through them too. They see different sides of it—the raw trauma, the logistical nightmare, the surreal hilarity—a few see all of it.

Friends who worked it out with me include Ron Athey, Nao Bustamante, Gavin Butt, Joshua Chambers Letson, Peter Coviello, Robb Hernández, Amelia Jones, Sarah Kessler, Kevin Kopelson, David Kurnick, Ming Yuen S. Ma, Jonathan Maghen, Molly McGarry, Mandy Merck, Giles Miller, Ricardo Montez, Tavia Nyong'o, Michelle Raheja, Emma Stapely, Jim Tobias, and Karen Tongson. Deborah Willis dedicated herself to getting our department through harassment-related crises, including mine. George Haggerty, a friend and mentor who died just as I was finishing this book, attended the interview held around my case at school and also, importantly, invited me to coteach a seminar on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work. I shared the most, however, with José Muñoz: he was my ideal conversation partner and, a decade on, I still miss him.

Many people let me share this work at their institutions and gave me much-needed editorial support. "A Pain in the Neck" was first shared at my second home, Human Resources Los Angeles. This text was originally published as "Letting Go" in *Insecurity*, an anthology developed from a tremendous conference at the Center for 21st Century Studies and the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, edited by Richard Grusin. Colleagues (faculty, staff, and students) at the following campuses hosted lectures, workshops, and shared recommendations with me: University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Davis; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Chicago; McGill University; Hobart and William Smith Colleges; Vassar College; New York University; University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; the Hammer Museum; Rutgers University; Concordia University; the English Institute; and the University of Essex. Feedback from audiences at SUNY Stony Brook and at the University of Alberta transformed this project. Ann Pellegrini invited me to return to my interest in psychoanalytic theory with an invitation to speak at a conference honoring Muriel Dimen: this led to my work on paranoia. Robyn Wiegman invited me to contribute to a special issue of *differences* dedicated to #metoo and the problem of sexual panic. In that same year, Kyla Wazana Tompkins reached out to ask if I would contribute work to the English Institute's conference on truth-telling. These two invitations led to the writing of two of the chapters in this book ("Harassment and the Privileges of Unknowing" and "Alethurgy's Shadows"). A writers residency at the Banff Center for Creativity led to this book's completion. I am deeply grateful for the weeks I spent there in March 2022. I am deeply grateful to Hal Sedgwick for our conversations about Eve, and to the archivists at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture for their dedication to making her papers available.

Finally, I want to acknowledge a special group of graduate students who helped me reconnect with graduate pedagogy and with my writing: José Alfaro, Sarah Buckner, Mack Gregg, Rudi Kraeher, Hannah Manshel, and Miranda Steege. This book is dedicated, with all my heart, to them.

INTRODUCTION

If all you knew about stalking was what you learned from *Law & Order*, *Dirty John*, or *Snapped*, you would think that most victims are terrified that they will be killed. There is a strong relationship between stalking and violence. Murder victims are often stalked before the big event. But this is not what keeps a victim up at night. When asked to describe what most haunts them, victims lead not with the fear that they will be hurt. They lead with the anxiety of not knowing what is going to happen; right behind that is the fear that it will never end.[1] These are the conditions of being afraid of life.

Victims describe the experience as having reformatted their sense of self.[2] That was certainly true for me. I was stalked by a student. At work, I was caught in the maw of campus procedure. The unnerving forms of fear, anxiety, and distrust that define the experience of being stalked migrated into my workplace. What happened was painful and bizarre. It disturbed my relationship to writing, teaching, and mentoring. I tried to find ways to restore my relationship to my job and then struggled to accept that in some important ways the damage is permanent.

As you will learn, my writing became the scene of a compound form of violation. When I look back on this time, I think of a rape narrative cliché: the

shower scene in which the victim scrubs and scrubs as if she were trying to shed her skin. I used to find these scenes ridiculous—they are so often repeated—but then I caught myself doing my own version of it: scrubbing my writing of the personal voice that otherwise characterized my work. I do this most when I am writing from the place that was violated by what happened. Although personal experience led me to research subjects like harassment and paranoia, when I first wrote about these things I withdrew from the page. I worked at erasing my tracks, adopting a depersonalized voice that was me, and not-me. This is why I've made liberal use of the first person in what you've read so far. I am drawing that person back onto the page.

When I write about this sphere of experience, I confront things that are particular to the situation of the harassed. Creepy energy clings to victims. It is hard to write about harassment without drawing from the economies of sensation that amplify its debilitating effects. I've already done this: these opening paragraphs play to the inherent interest of a stalking narrative. Before we continue, let me dial things back. This person stopped harassing me years ago. Being stalked wasn't the worst thing that's happened in my life. If murder victims are often stalked, stalking victims are rarely murdered. On college campuses, most stalking behavior toward teachers is fleeting, lasting just a few weeks or months. People go through far worse than what I endured. The fact that this person was a student and not a former partner, for example, mitigated the invasiveness of the experience for me. The person who stalked me is not my enemy.

If there is a gothic dimension to the story of what happened to me, it resides not in the figure of a monster but in the paranoid environment of a large, deeply hierarchical institution like a university. This book describes what we lose when harassment ecologies consume us. Each chapter was carved out from the cluster of problems generated by sexualized forms of harassment and bias, and by the situation of writing from my experience and about my own case. In writing this, I have needed to confront my anger and interrogate my aims. For example: when I write as a victim of harassment, I am tempted to present myself as an aggrieved maverick pursuing a tough line of inquiry. I plead my case and ride a wave of self-righteous anger for an hour or two, and then I am beached. While a sense of grievance might be initiated by an actual wrong, it might also be sustained by a sense of entitlement—in that voice, I reconstruct the scene of my betrayal and lament the world that I was promised and denied. My modes of address are off—I am writing not for a

reader but for the person who refuses to listen, who abandons my case and turns their back on me. I cannot sustain that voice, so I abandon ship. I come back and sift through the wreckage, plucking out the sentences that argue, plead, and complain. They are sour bubbles of grievance.

Those forms of grievance characterize the most visible writing about sexual harassment and Title IX—stories about feminists accused of harassment, women accused by men, professors lamenting student hysteria, cries of censorship. Popular, widely read articles about specific cases can be characterized by devastating forms of carelessness. This writing thrives on melodramas of uncertainty ("he said/she said") and responds to harassment cases with a scramble for the nearest moral high ground. It is not supported by investigation, research, or even fact-checking.[3] Behind the discourse of harassment—by which I mean the narrative frameworks that shape the experience of and ideas about harassment—are assumptions about the relationship of sex and truth. These assumptions normalize the sense that, when it comes to sex, nothing is knowable, and, at the same time, they laminate the truth of sex to the obscene. Within these structures, sex "appears . . . as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power."[4] It is simultaneously invested with the force of the unspeakable and rendered into a privileged site for heroic truth-telling—this contradiction is weaponized within a harassment ecology. In those instances, victims are positioned as against sex. They are characterized as prudes and hysterics, as overly fragile, or, more brutally, as liars.

The uncertainties and contradictions that haunt the reception of stories of harassment are effects of harassment itself. Harassment's intensities can make it feel like the truth is not only unknowable but irrelevant. This does not mean that the identity of harassment's agents and objects is beyond knowing and saying. But that truth is sometimes disavowed by people who harass and by an abuser's community (this is the subject of chapter 4, which takes up a complaint filed against Larry Nassar that was dismissed by his community). Some people, furthermore, are driven to harass because they feel persecuted and harassed by others. It may be that nothing you say will convince them that the person they are harassing (or the system) isn't out to get them (this dynamic shaped my own case and is the focus of chapter 3, on paranoia).

Harassment is intimate and intensely social. The truth of a harassment case nests in the platform through which that case emerged—for example, the campus, the family, the workplace. Harassment is a nonconsensual form of relation in which a whole scene collaborates. A focus on the monstrosity of

the abuser can deflect and contain the ongoing crisis that abuse and the administration of a case present for victims and their workplaces, schools, and homes. The full truth of a harassment case is not guaranteed by the naming of victim and abuser. Harassment is a toxic feature of social ecology: antiharassment work is fundamental to the cultivation of a good work environment and livable life. Harassment flourishes in neglected spaces, and it is a necessary feature of discriminatory structures. Harassment digs into us at exactly the point at which work and life, public and private converge.

The environment around a harassment case can be so brutalizing that people instinctively back away from everyone associated with it: this fact has been made worse by social media platforms engineered to cultivate outrage, fear, and dread. Stories about campus sexual harassment break on blogs and then appear in *Inside Higher Education* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, trade platforms that convert a grievance, a rumor, a complaint into a news story. Then, if the accused is famous enough and the campus elite enough, the fact that these stories were published in those venues is covered by the *New York Times*, and then we get think pieces, threads, more blog posts, and so on. Investigative journalism about sexual harassment cases in higher education has shifted public awareness, but victim-centered, grounded, and complex investigative reporting is, by its very nature, antisensationalist.[5] That reporting holds far less grip on our imaginations than writing that allows us to purge our sense of guilt and shame. The news of a harassment case arrives as a scandal, the exposure of which is offered to us as if it were, in and of itself, a solution. The truth of harassment, however, is that it is baked into many of the systems that govern us, and the scandal economy that grows around it is a part of those systems.

Our sexual lives unfold within the social systems into which we are born, and against which many of us struggle. Love, shame, beauty: these things are material expressions of those systems, as is a sense of family, race, and sex. The shape and direction of desire, its objects, the sense of what satisfaction is, whose desires matter, who gets to have or to be family, what pleasures are good and attainable, what pleasures are forbidden and unspeakable—these modes of relation and systems of value are local and have histories. Our lives are material expressions of evolving systems of value that precede us, that conjure and constitute us. This is why harassment matters so much, and why sexualized forms of harassment are so debilitating. It is a vehicle through which people abuse power, steal and hoard resources, and

render people unable to act or engage in collaboration and the work of social transformation.[6]

When you file a federal workplace complaint (as I did), you have to give your grievance a material shape that makes sense to the systems governing your labor. This can be an exercise in consciousness-raising regarding the way race and sex cement or slice through your psychic investment in the promises of an institution. The toxic forms of grievance I describe above—forms of grievance that have, at times, grabbed me by the ankles—are underwritten by the promises of institutions. Some of these, like a sense of basic safety, are necessary to our work. Other promises, those of recognition, reward, and something I have described elsewhere as a sense of security, are grand and available only to the most entitled.[7] I have needed to ask myself what it is I actually want and need from the institution for which I work.

The experience of harassment is so much bigger, so much more diffuse than the forms of harm those processes are designed to recognize. *Shadow of My Shadow* accounts for the things I could not articulate within those kinds of structures. In writing this, I have had to ask myself, what did I lose, actually? What is this form of grief, and why is it so hard for me to name it? The opening chapter, about a conversation with the artist Adrian Howells, takes up those questions. That event was the first time I spoke in public about how much being stalked was impacting my work. Written after Howells died in 2014, this chapter is about grief wrapped in grief. "A Pain in the Neck," this book's second chapter, addresses my experience as a stalking and harassment victim. I struggled over this chapter's placement: I have sandwiched this story in between chapters that feel less exposing and less implicated in the toxic ecology of sensation that blooms around stalking victims. Readers who want to read this narrative first are welcome to do so—I want you to feel, however, that this is not where the story starts for me. It starts with the attempt to express how I was changed. "A Case of Paranoia," the third chapter, grew out of a forensic curiosity. I wanted to understand complaint pathology and the paranoid character of nearly all discourse about harassment. I wanted to understand the paranoia that flooded my life.

The last two chapters of this book represent the kind of writing I produced when I wanted to disappear. I published *Campus Sex, Campus Security* in 2015. That book applies what I was learning as a victim to the networked crises gripping college campuses. In a series of brief reflections on cases of

police violence, sexual abuse, and privacy violation, I address the amplification of raced and gendered forms of vulnerability, the revictimization of people fighting harassment and abuse, the securitization of the campus, and the ongoing assault on public education in the United States. I lean heavily on the literature for other people's cases—a student at the University of California, Los Angeles; a student at Rutgers University; students at the University of California, Davis, and at Pennsylvania State University; and a faculty member at Arizona State University. In the book's preface, and at the request of my editors, I mentioned the fact that I was stalked and explained that this experience was important to the development of the book. That was all I said about my own case—at the time, harassment was so prevalent in my life that I was afraid that writing in any more detail about my experiences at work would trigger more harassment, not just of me but of students in my department. None of that book's case studies resemble my own, but they allowed me to share some of the wisdom that grew out around the administration of my case and drew me, as a scholar, into new spaces of inquiry. Because it is rooted in a case study, the fourth chapter of this book, "Harassment and the Privileges of Unknowing: The Case of Larry Nassar," is quite similar to *Campus Sex, Campus Security*. I tell the story of a complaint filed against Nassar by Amanda Thomashow and dismissed by administrators at Michigan State University. The scale of Nassar's abuse is hard to comprehend: over decades, while embedded in the world of elite gymnastics and college sports, he abused hundreds of girls and women. This chapter is a study of one document at the center of one case of what trauma studies scholars have termed "institutional betrayal."[8] I write there about a single case that has been subsumed by a story of serial abuse. We have not only the proliferation of victims around Nassar but the proliferation of abusive doctors working for decades within institutions, producing yet more victims. Every sexual harassment complaint, every instance of sexual assault raises this problem of the relationship of individual and systemic violation.

It is hard to center our thinking on victims, especially when confronted with so many. The last chapter of this book is a companion to my writing about the Nassar case: the two essays were written alongside each other. Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan* Novels center on a friendship between two women that formed when they were little girls. "Alethurgy's Shadows" reads Ferrante's work a little against its grain, using the novels to consider how sexualized forms of violence shape our relationships with each other, especially as we settle into fantasies about each other's truth. We can fail each other when

shared senses of vulnerability are contained and managed by projection, disavowal, and denial. The need to be *not her*, meaning, not a victim, hardens into a refusal and sets the limits of who we are to each other and what we do for each other. Those modes of distancing are defense mechanisms. They represent an integration of feelings of loss, betrayal, and anger into a paranoid relationship of the self to others—this distancing gesture structures not only intimate networks of love and family but also relationships to the organizations, groups, and institutions in and for which we work.

I conclude this book by turning to the moment I think of as the beginning of this story. There, I try to stitch my relationship to my work back together, this time with the help of my teacher, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose work is threaded throughout this book.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Baum, Catalano, Rand, and Rose, "National Crime Victimization Survey," 7.

2. Spitzberg, Nicastro, and Cousins, "Exploring the Interactional Phenomenon of Stalking."

3. I take up the broad sense that sexual harassment and assault cases cannot be reported (because they can't be researched) in *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, in a brief discussion of the infamous 2014 *Rolling Stone* article, "A Rape on Campus." Jia Tolentino discusses that case in thoughtful detail in *Trick Mirror*. For a case-based analysis of the difficulty of administering sexual harassment complaints on campus, see Brodsky, *Sexual Justice*. Laura Kipnis's *Unwanted Advances* is one of the worst examples of the kind of irresponsible, harmful writing about harassment cases I am describing here. There, she briefly discusses a case in my department. Her discussion of that case is harmful.

4. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 103.

5. For excellent reporting on campus-based harassment cases, see Jessica Luther and Dan Solomon's reporting of sexual harassment at Baylor University for *Texas Monthly* (e.g., Luther and Solomon, "Silence at Baylor") and Nidhi Subbaraman's reporting of an investigation at UC Santa Cruz for *BuzzFeed* (e.g., Subbaraman, "Some Called It 'Vigilante Justice'").

6. A slightly different version of this paragraph opens my foreword to Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, ix.

7. The difficult experiences of many women of color in the academy grow in part from being placed at great remove from these hollow forms of promise. Important publications addressing this fact include Niemann et al., *Presumed Incompetent*; and Ahmed, *On Being Included*.

8. See, for example, Smith and Freyd, "Dangerous Safe Havens."