

that they say. We suggest, therefore, that adopting the strategies outlined here might be more welcome than teachers might imagine.

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[JALT PRACTICE] TLT INTERVIEWS



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An Interview with Fiona Creaser

Welcome to our final interview for 2018! Our featured discussion is with Fiona Creaser, an Associate Professor at the University of Kitakyushu. She received her doctorate in East Asian Studies from the University of Durham, which investigated the problem of sexual harassment

in Japan. She has published on various forms of harassment, including workplace bullying and mobbing. She teaches gender studies, and her research interests include sexual harassment, workplace bullying, and women's self-development and empowerment programmes. Ms. Creaser was interviewed by Robert O'Mochain, an Associate Professor in the College of International Relations at Ritsumeikan University. He received his doctoral degree from Temple University

Japan. His doctoral research explored the implications of homophobia in the lives of teachers and students in Japan. More recently, he has explored the implications of sexual harassment in educational contexts and the possibilities of exploring sexual harassment themes within a Critical Pedagogy approach. So, without further ado, to the interview!



Robert O'Mochain: *Can you tell us what you have published on sexual harassment issues?*

Fiona Creaser: I've published a few articles over the past few years (see References). It's still clear to me that sexual harassment and workplace bullying are still not fully understood by most people. I've lost count of the times people have said to me that they feel they can't compliment a woman on how nice she looks because of sexual harassment policies, or how someone is being bullied, but no one knows how to handle the situation properly. Sexual harassment and workplace bullying are horrible experiences for anyone to go through, and working in this field really throws up the dark side of organizations. Over the years, I've received phone calls and emails from people with whom I have once worked telling me they are being harassed and not knowing what to do about it. In each of these conversations, the person usually begins by saying, "Now I know what you mean when you talk about harassment, Fiona."

Why do you think it is important to raise this topic?

Well, it is not going away. No matter how tight workplace/organizational policies seem to be, people are still subjected to sexual harassment and workplace bullying. The problem will not go away until workplaces/organizations start actively creating safe places for people to work in. At the moment, there are a lot of people who are still left feeling angry, helpless, and isolated because of harassment they have experienced.

Do you find that all forms of harassment are taken seriously? Is there an equally strong commitment to pursue a case of sexual harassment as there is for, say, a case of power harassment?

This is a difficult question to answer. The law in Japan is very clear about sexual harassment. Therefore, it may be easier for an organization to pursue a problem of sexual harassment over power ha-

arrassment. However, with sexual harassment, it's very difficult to persuade a victim to come forward because the cases are so complicated. The victim may feel guilty, especially if alcohol were involved. There's a tendency to blame the victim of sexual harassment, especially if the victim is a woman. As with rape and other forms of sexual abuse, it is very often the case that the woman is put on trial, and her reputation is brought into question rather than the perpetrator's. The problem with power harassment is that it can be disguised as a managerial difficulty—the manager is just doing her/his job, and if the person subordinate to the manager doesn't like it, then the problem is with the subordinate and not with the manager. I also think that in Japan, the problem with power harassment is exacerbated because of the *senpai/kohai* nature of workplace relationships. There are merits to the *senpai/kohai* structure, such as team building skills and very good mentoring if you have a good *senpai*, but the negative side is that it can become an excuse for workplace harassment. Generally, my experience is that many people won't ever engage with any harassment issues unless it actually happens to them. At the time when I was trying to rally support for anti-harassment policies, though, they were nowhere to be seen!

That reminds me of a comment from Tamarah Cohen (Kansai-based gender scholar). She said she has attended various language conference presentations on the topic of sexual harassment. However, the presenters and audience members are invariably women. Why aren't men taking the issue seriously enough? Can the situation be improved?

Sexual harassment seems to be perceived, unfortunately, as a woman's problem and not something that men need to necessarily know about. Let's face it, if you're not doing the harassment and aren't being harassed, why bother finding out about it? I don't know how the situation can be improved. I think organizations need to take the initiative and show men that sexual harassment really happens, and by looking the other way, you are supporting it.

Men feeling unable to compliment a woman in the workplace is certainly nowhere near the trauma women go through when they experience sexual harassment.

Some commentators distinguish between proactive rather than reactive sexual harassment policies among university administrators and governors. How would you distinguish or characterize the two approaches?

Proactive campaigns work better as people can have the confidence to make a complaint about harassment. However, reactive campaigns generally don't

work. If cases of harassment happen in a university which has no procedures, the top-level management people react badly once complaints start to surface as they don't know how to deal with the complaints and are worried about bad publicity.

How do you actually implement proactive policies?

Proactive approaches do a number of things: They actively create safe places, and they make procedures that allow faculty and students to complain to empathetic staff members of a counselling service on campus. If such a service is absent, people will be too intimidated about having to speak to the managing director of the department. You need good quality seminars for faculties and students. Go through guidelines, have role-plays with faculty, and inform students about potentially dangerous situations: "Zemi" drinking parties for example—if you are laughing and smiling during the event, you don't have to continue if someone harasses you sexually. That person has crossed a line, and you have the right to call them out immediately.

In her article "The Making of Sekuhara: Sexual Harassment in Japanese Culture" Kazue Muto (2008, pp. 56-57) says:

"In any company, both employers and employees try hard to maintain good relations among coworkers. It is not uncommon for sexual harassment incidents to occur in efforts to develop *wa*, but group harmony and *wa* often prevent sexual harassment victims from resolving the problem. In typical working conditions, male conduct from which women suffer, such as unwelcome sexual jokes, is often perceived as creating harmony in the office."

In situations where alcohol runs freely, as is the case with most social gatherings in Japan, women are often subject to unwanted sexual jokes, gestures, and unwanted touching. The behavior is excused precisely because of the social setting. It also has to be made clear that the career of the male teacher in an educational setting is not a sacrosanct value. The educational institute has to drive home the fact that women's lives are ruined by the trauma of sexual harassment, and men's lives and career trajectories should not be given higher priority than those of women.

What are your own reflections on the recent "epidemic" of revelations about sexual harassment by prominent political leaders, Hollywood celebrities, TV personalities, and the like?

It doesn't surprise me in the least. You talk to most women, and they will have a story to tell you about

unwelcome sexual advances in the workplace. What is happening in Hollywood is happening in all organizations, and it is just the tip of the iceberg. I think it is brilliant that powerful women are now speaking out against this behaviour. For me, it just proves that we need more women in powerful positions in our daily working lives to come out and champion other women who are perhaps not in positions where they can speak out against harassment in the workplace. Women need to help women, and men need to recognize that sexual harassment is not just a one-off incident by "the office perv." Research data shows that most offenders are multiple offenders.

One commentator for The Japan Times says we need a massive "Me Too" hashtag campaign in Japan, just as there has been in other parts of the world. Would you like to see that happening? Or should victims of sexual harassment in Japan find a different way to seek justice against perpetrators?

Again, this is a very difficult question to answer, and yes, I think the "Me Too" campaign was very powerful. I'm also a "Me Too" woman, but I think it's very difficult for women to come forward and talk about past experiences of sexual harassment or abuse. It can mean dragging up very painful memories for some women, and they may feel that they can't go public with their experiences for fear of being judged by their families, neighbours, and work colleagues. I think there's a greater awareness now amongst women in Japan regarding sex segregation and harassment. It seems to be a very popular topic with my 12-year-old daughter and her friends. They're even raising gender-related issues with their teachers. For example, if teachers tell the boys to carry tables because they are stronger than the girls, the girls will speak up and say, "No, we can also carry tables as well as the boys." This is a good thing, and let's face it, my daughter and her friends are the future of Japan. I think Japanese women and men are becoming tired with the status quo, and things will change for the better for women. But it is tough here, I know. If you're a contract worker with precarious work conditions, why would you put your job in danger? If a single woman goes public with allegations, her prospects for marriage may be severely damaged, and that's a reality for women here. There is also a strong social pressure not to appear rebellious before authority in any way, especially for women.

Yes, because the underlying problem is a society being sexist, that men are given more status than women, and offenders know they can get away with it.

Yes, totally.

For this year's annual conference, JALT provided guidelines on harassment issues. What is your assessment of their "Code of Conduct Complaint Procedures?"

Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to attend the JALT national conference this year, so I'm unable to make any comments about how the guidelines on harassment issues were promoted. I do, however, think it's very positive that JALT are coming to grips with the problem of sexual harassment and are trying to promote awareness of the issue at their conferences. As for the guidelines themselves, I think they are a step in the right direction. One of the best things about the guidelines is how inclusive they are. Speaking from the point of view of a woman born with one hand, I often experience unwelcome touching. Strangers feel it is their right to suddenly grab my right arm and start to prod and poke it. When I ask them to stop, they're the ones who look offended, almost like they are saying, "How dare a one-handed woman tell me, a two-handed person, what I can or can't do to you." Also, because I have one hand, people feel they can freely make comments about my body such as, "Nice body. It's such a shame about your arm, it must be so difficult for you." I have to say I have received no negative comments about my physical appearance at any JALT event, and for me to see people with disabilities included in their Code of Conduct is a breath of fresh air because people like me are frequently forgotten about and rendered invisible. I would like to see a link to the JALT Code of Conduct as soon as you open up the JALT homepage.

What is your response to language educators who say, "I'm just a language teacher. These issues have nothing to do with me or my teaching?"

As educators, we have responsibilities to our students who could be victims of harassment. We have responsibilities to our work colleagues who could also be victims. Harassment could be happening in the organizations we belong to, such as JALT, so we need to be aware that harassment happens. No one is immune to harassment, and it could happen to you when you least expect it.

I know you are currently looking at women's development programmes. Please let us know more about the scope and objectives of the research.

In 2015, I attended the FWSA Biennial Conference in Leeds and gave a presentation entitled "Mobbing in the Japanese Workplace: Causes, Consequences, and Possible Solutions." After talking to feminist scholars in the UK and listening to one of the conferences keynote speakers, Igea Troiani, a feminist

architect, talk about the construction of physically safe buildings, streets, and parks for women, I began to realise that in most organisations, there are no safe places for victims of harassment to go to, either virtually or physically. I began to think of how women could create spaces of safety through self-development and take ownership of their immediate physical and virtual personal/work space.

To this end, for the last two and half years, I have been working with a group of like-minded women to introduce a UK-based Women's Work and Personal Development programme to Japan. We have linguistically and culturally translated the *Springboard Women's Development Workbook* into Japanese, and we have licensed trainers to run the programme in Japan using Japanese, English, or delivering bilingual programmes where necessary. It is my hope that by delivering this already internationally successful programme, women will be able to acquire the tools necessary to improve their immediate environment and create safe networking spaces where they can share experiences of difficulties they face in their life. (*Springboard* is delivered in 45 countries worldwide and has been translated into 15 different languages).

Thank you for your time and for deepening our understanding of some very timely and challenging topics.

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Places to go for advice on harassment:

Sexual Harassment on Campus: National Network: キャンパス・セクシュアル・ハラスメント・全国ネットワーク : <http://cshnet.jp>

Network for the Action against Academic Harassment: アカデミック・ハラスメントをなくすネットワーク: <http://www.naah.jp/>