

June 30, 2016

Dear Melissa,

Many thanks for your thoughtful letter, and especially also for writing **to** me rather than about me, and for giving me an opportunity to respond. You are the first person outside my circle of friends to do so, and I am deeply grateful for this.

Let me apologize in advance for any inelegance in what follows. I am overwhelmed by this crisis, yet want to write you from my heart rather than give some lawyerly response, even at the risk of having some of my response held against me.

Your letter contains insights on issues I ought to have thought about more carefully much earlier. These issues are immensely important, beyond my own case, and deserve our full attention. One issue concerns romantic relations between people who are broadly in the same field but at different career stages and institutions. I had not fully realized how problematic they can be, especially when a senior male scholar has such relations repeatedly. As you explain, such relations can affect how younger women working with him are perceived, including those who have co-authored publications with him in the past.

Another issue concerns “sexualized contact”. It is clear to me now that I should have slept in my seat on the flight home and not have shared a room with Lopez Aguilar. She had said, as she confirms, that she felt unsafe staying by herself in a Latin American city. In retrospect, the solution would have been to ask the graduate student who was with us in Santiago and who had booked Lopez Aguilar’s room to share this room with her (even though she had arranged to stay with a relative). These should be bright-line issues clearly off-limits.

I have always veered towards interacting with students and junior professionals as equals, minimizing hierarchy and polite formalities. I realize now that this may have caused misinterpretations with discomfort and occasionally the perception that a relationship was being sexualized. It could be easy and natural to have a walk or bike ride or meal with a student or younger person, to invite such a person to one’s home or to accept an invitation to her home. But in a social context where such activities may be associated with romance, I agree they should best be avoided. While I assume that it was alright to invite Lopez Aguilar along with others on the glacier daytrip, it was not alright then to invite her on the Valparaiso daytrip with just the two of us, an invitation that (unbeknownst to me at the time) did in fact make her apprehensive. It would be helpful to have, and I would want to participate in, a broader discussion about these matters: to canvas the relevant considerations and arguments, and to formulate some bright-line rules as well as reasonable expectations and guidelines. Perhaps we can form some group or forum to discuss how to formulate norms of professional conduct regarding romantic relationships in the profession.

While these issues are serious and important, what's at the forefront of the public anger against me is the perception that I have engaged in sexual harassment, employment retaliation in response to charges of sexual misconduct and – especially – sexual assault. Sexual violence was not part of Lopez Aguilar's 2011 complaint at Yale, but it became the exclusive focus of the 2014 fundraiser entitled "Help us sue the school protecting a known rapist," in which I was also accused of a "brutal, sadistic attempt at rape" upon her. *BuzzFeed* repeated the assault claim even while it possesses the entire G-Chat that Lopez Aguilar had with her boyfriend immediately after the alleged attack, which is the best evidence on whether it occurred. You write that "it is truly mind-boggling that you would choose to respond to the *BuzzFeed* article by trying to discredit your accuser," and many others have been angered by this aspect of my first response. But what am I supposed to do? Ought I to believe the assault allegation even though I was right there and know that nothing happened? And others, should they take it as a given that I am guilty of assault; or should they consider the possibility at least that I am telling the truth and then try to get and examine the available evidence?

You speak of a long train of abuses. But here too one should distinguish allegations from established facts. Christia Mercer writes that she was told by others that I had told a staff member to spin around and had assaulted a student. I have done neither and know of no such complaints ever brought against me. But such things may well have been said about me in the wake of the fierce political battles in the Columbia Philosophy Department in the 1990s. There was one actual complaint against me at that time (1995), which was resolved through mediation, that is, without any hearing or investigation. I don't ask you to believe my denial – only that you not take third-hand stories as conclusive when they can readily be checked by tracing them to their source: to whoever told Mercer and then to the student or staff member supposedly mistreated. I am eager to see such an investigation and will fully cooperate with it.

The proliferation of stories is also fueled by the fact that present perceptions are substantially swayed by an unprecedented campaign to present me as a sexual predator. To recount just the highlights, in June 2012, Lopez-Aguilar's law firm (Olivarius) sent dozens if not hundreds of official letters to my current and former students and associates, characterizing me as a serial sexual predator and inviting recipients to contact them to register complaints about me. In May 2013, Olivarius hired Lopez Aguilar for 16 months (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/fernanda-lopez-aguilar-esq-2098664a>), setting up a potential conflict between her interests and those of the firm. One year later, Lopez-Aguilar escalated her charges in the fundraiser, which was publicly supported by many prominent academics (who could not have seriously believed that I was a "known rapist"). At the same time "Aye," who also worked closely with Olivarius, published her "Moral Hero" blog; and Jason Stanley published a mini-blog saying that Yale was seeking sexual misconduct complaints about me.

Further amplified by internet and media, this massive campaign, has deeply primed and reshaped perceptions. Once someone is widely associated with sexual predation, then any young woman he is or has ever been seen with may easily be mistaken for one of his victims, then his openness or awkwardness can easily be misinterpreted as "hitting on" or "grooming"

someone, then much of whatever he does can be misperceived as aiming for his own sexual gratification. The campaign also intimidated and marginalized the many women I had taught and been friends with over the years – including the 20 whose doctoral theses I supervised, who all worked with me for years and have seen me interact with others over those staggered periods. Friendships with women of all ages have been absolutely central to my life; and I am deeply saddened that these friendships are under such severe pressure now and in some cases being grotesquely misperceived and misrepresented.

It is some consolation to me that, despite that 4-year campaign, Jason Stanley's public call for "information that may be relevant to violation of university policy, i.e. that involves his professional behavior towards other philosophers in his status as a Yale Professor, even students in his areas at other universities" has yielded no new complaints from anyone I encountered at Yale or at any of the 600+ academic and non-academic venues I have visited since joining Yale.

I realize of course that the facts that many women have had good relations with me for many years and others have had no complaints does not speak to the allegations. The most serious of these – assault, harassment, retaliation – urgently need further professional investigation.

With regard to the other allegations – sexualized contact, inappropriate romantic relations – we need to work toward clearer norms of professional conduct, and I need to take responsibility for what I have done wrong and make amends if possible. While I wish that people had a more accurate sense of what I actually have (and haven't) done, I am also grateful to be shown by you and others where my conduct has been in conflict with my values and ethical standpoint.

Abuse of power, especially against women and women of color in particular, is a deep injustice central to our current civilizational crisis. I have worked on such issues throughout my career, most recently by initiating and participating in a team effort to develop the first gender-sensitive poverty measure, focusing on individuals rather than households. I will continue such work toward a just and democratic world without patriarchy and other forms of domination, and will recalibrate my values and conduct to reflect this.

Again, Melissa, I am deeply grateful to you that you took the time to write to me. I am willing to talk, learn, rethink, and I would welcome an opportunity to work with other academics on framing effective policy in this area. With that said, I hope you understand that, even as I acknowledge my faults, I must stand firm on fighting the allegations of sexual violence that have been the centerpiece of the internet denunciations and media coverage against me since 2014. I am ready to accept that I have run afoul of norms of professional conduct. But it's hugely important to get clear on which norms exactly I have violated.

Sincerely,

Thomas