



Astronomy Allies

Heather Flewelling and Katherine Alatalo

Topics

- Who I am
- Sexual harassment vs harassment
- My harassment (motivation for astronomy allies)
- The creation of Astronomy Allies
- The impact we've had so far
- Heather's concerns

Who is Heather Flewelling?

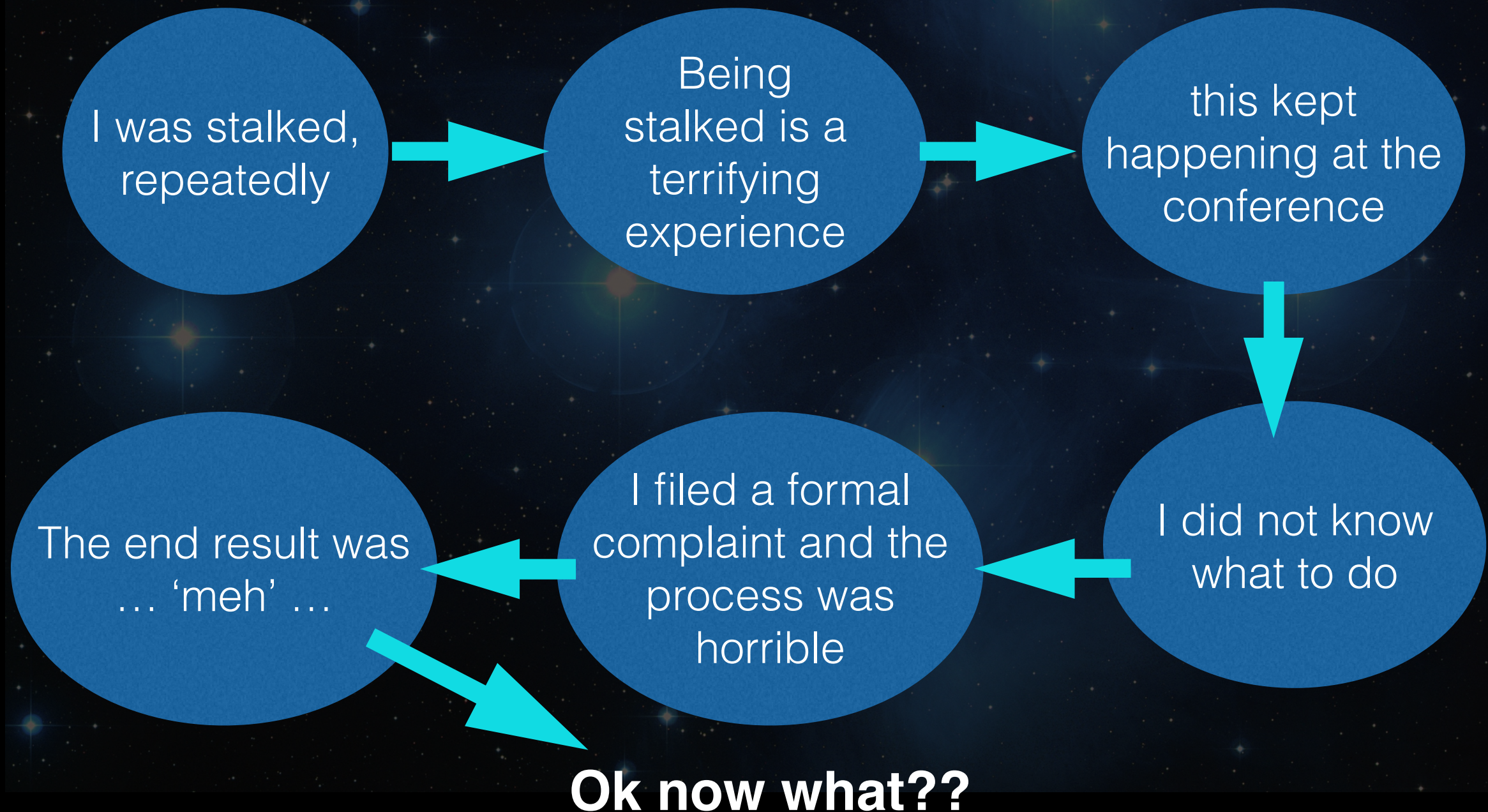
- I am a researcher at the Institute for Astronomy, in Honolulu, Hawaii, working on Pan-STARRS processing / database/ science.
- I am not an expert in sexual harassment
- I am part of a very small team that created the world's largest astronomy database (specifically: building the database and schema)
- Annnnnndddd....
- I am known in the Astronomy Community as the co-creator of Astronomy Allies?!?!
- I'd like to be known for my science!

Sexual Harassment



~~Sexual~~ Harassment

A story of my harassment



My Motivation for Astronomy Allies

I didn't feel safe at conferences

My Motivation for Astronomy Allies

How do we make me feel safe?

Creation of Astronomy Allies

It started off with Katey and I talking a lot about what to do. We didn't know what to do exactly, but figured it was better to try than to do nothing.

Women In Astronomy

Wednesday, September 10, 2014

Fed Up with Sexual Harassment II: The Astronomy Allies Program

Posted by Joan Schmelz



Today's guest blogger is Katey Alatalo. Katey is a postdoc at the Infrared Processing and Analysis Center at Caltech. Her research interests include using CARMA and ALMA to map cold molecular gas in candidates from AGN feedback and using Herschel to map the conditions in shocked molecular gas in interacting groups of galaxies.

Suppose you are standing at your AAS poster, and someone is monopolizing your time and standing way too close. Suppose you meet a senior scientist at the AAS meeting, and s/he asks you to dinner under the pretext of discussing your work, but the conversation gets way too personal. Suppose you drink a bit too much or stay out a bit too late at the AAS party, and you need a safe way to get back to your hotel. What do you do? Contact Astronomy Allies.

The Astronomy Allies Program consists of volunteers who act to form a "safe-zone" at AAS meetings. An Astronomy Ally can act as a buffer, bystander, or advocate. As a meeting participant, you can contact an Ally if you need help. Allies can provide confidential advice, support, information, and resources. They can serve as a liaison between you and the AAS administration. They can help create an environment where the perpetrators of harassment feel they "can't get away" with their unprofessional and disturbing behavior. As knowledge of the Allies Program grows, their very existence may help prevent future problems before they start.

How do you get in touch with the Allies Program? You can text, tweet, or email the Allies Program, and someone with an Allies insignia will find you. You can sit down and talk confidentially. Allies will listen without judgment, offer advice when needed, and provide resources in case you decide you want to report the incident to the AAS. Nothing except the type of incident will be shared with the AAS without your explicit consent.

At the AAS party, Allies will offer Safewalks back to hotels. Since a lot of the worst incidents have taken place where alcohol is prevalent, think of Allies as the "designated drivers," getting you to your hotel safely and (hopefully) harassment-free. No matter is too small for Allies involvement – if it has made you uncomfortable, let Allies help.

How do you change the world? Start small. Start smart. There is significant attrition of women compared to men in astronomy, even after women have committed to study astronomy in college. There are many factors that play into this, but one of these is the importance of one's first "professional" experience. For many undergraduate astronomy majors, their first exposure to a large-scale astronomy conference is the AAS winter meeting. The AAS meeting provides many students a first-look at the astronomy community, and therefore can have a disproportionately influential impact on a student's decision to remain in astronomy (or not). This is also a known hunting ground for serial sexual harassers. Can you imagine coming to your first professional astronomy conference, having a luminary in the field pay special attention to you, and then start steering conversations toward your personal life and your sexual partners? It might completely change the way you see astronomy. First impressions are important. This is why targeting the AAS meetings first has the potential to have a significant impact.

Now imagine an AAS meeting with an Allies Program, with carefully vetted people who wear their support of victims on their sleeves? If you were a victim, knowing there were people around who would support you without judgment and help you feel safe, you might feel a lot more positive about the experience at the meeting. As for the harassers, the meetings would become a dangerous place to practice their craft, as more eyes would be on them, and their targets would feel more comfortable coming forward.

Heather Flewelling (IfA) and I are committed to forming this group of Astronomy Allies. Like the AAS party, this starts with a small group of people who care and want to help, and we plan to expand. This is a first step toward making the astronomy community safer and more welcoming - and what better way to do that than to give people a chance to put their support of this into action.

Allies is in its nascent state, but there are already people who are committed to it and excited about it. Becoming a bona fide Ally will be by invitation-only; you cannot just volunteer. Allies is an exclusive group. This is, in part, to avoid the inevitable danger of the "wolf in sheep's clothing." Allies is being extremely careful about who gets to wear the badge. Allies does welcome any suggestions or offers of help. If you have questions/comments, a story you want to share, or advice to offer, please contact the Allies Program at astronomyallies_at_gmail_dot_com.

What are the Astronomy Allies?

Allies are a safe zone.

Allies are a resource.

Allies are a network.

Allies are a presence.

We submitted an abstract for the AAS

Title: Introducing Astronomy Allies: We are here to help!
Authors: [Flewelling, Heather](#); [Alatalo, Katherine A.](#)
Affiliation: AA(University of Hawaii), AB(Caltech/IPAC)
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Abstract

Imagine you are a grad student, at your first conference, and a prominent senior scientist shows interest in your work, and he makes things get way too personal? What would you do? Would you report it? Or would you decide, after a few other instances of harassment, that maybe you shouldn't pursue astronomy? Harassment is under-reported, the policies can be difficult to understand or hard to find, and it can be very intimidating as a young scientist to report it to the proper individuals. The Astronomy Allies Program is designed to help you with these sorts of problems. We are a group of volunteers that will help by doing the following: provide safe walks home during the conference, someone to talk to confidentially, as an intervener, as a resource to report harassment. The Allies are a diverse group of scientists committed to acting as mentors, advocates, and liaisons. The Winter 2015 AAS meeting will be the first meeting that has Astronomy Allies, and Astronomy Allies will provide a website for information, as well as a twitter, email, and phone number for anyone who needs our help or would like more information. We posted about the Astronomy Allies on the Women In Astronomy blog, and this program resonates with many people: either they want to help, or they have experienced harassment in the past and don't want to see it in the future. Harassment may not happen to most conference participants, but it's wrong, it's against the AAS anti-harassment policy (<http://aas.org/policies/anti-harassment-policy>), it can be very damaging, and if it happens to even one person, that is unacceptable. We intend to improve the culture at conferences to make it so that harassers feel they can't get away with their unprofessional behavior.

Astronomy Allies at the Jan 2014 AAS

We had buttons signifying who the allies were

A poster describing who we are and what we do

An active twitter account / email / phone / webpage for
people to contact us and get more info

We offered 'party walks' from the unofficial party to the
hotels (>50 walked home)

~30 of us were allies (we ran out of buttons!), now > 70

What happens if you experience harassment?

You find one of the allies.

If the ally is a mandatory reporter, we find another ally that isn't.

The ally writes down what happened, and hands it back to you. We keep no records of this.

The ally offers mentoring / resources / other support as needed.

You are in control. You decide if you want to officially report, and you decide what level of support you need.

Impact of Astronomy Allies

AAS now has a much improved anti-harassment policy, it is prominently displayed as you enter meeting rooms, and there is a phone number to call if you encounter problems

People self-organize their own safe walks home from dinners and parties

Anecdotal evidence from various professors that they get far less reports of problems from their undergrad/grad students

The body language of undergrads/grads at conferences is much more relaxed

Other societies have created EntoAllies, PhysicsAllies, SBAllies (and probably more)

Heather's Concerns

I already have a full time job, hard to manage Astronomy Allies and research

We have a very flat structure - would like something more?

We lack funding - would like bystander intervention training

Emotional cost with helping others - fear some get burned out

Hard to grow! related: how to manage a growing organization

We need more diverse allies (undergrads / senior colleagues / men / LGBTQIA / people of color)

Can't just create this in a university setting (mandatory reporting requirements and everyone would want to be an ally / office politics)

Who are the Astronomy Allies?

Katey Alatalo, Stacey Alberts, Crystal Anderson, Sarah Ballard, Rachael Beaton, Heather Bloemhard, Sheryl Bruff, James Bullock, Adam Burgasser, Sabrina Cales, Gaby Canalizo, Caitlin Casey, Phil Cigan, Jennifer Connelly, Alison Crocker, Kelle Cruz, Meredith Danowski, Jennifer Donovan Meyer, Heather Flewelling, Francesca Fornasini, Jonathan Fraine, Bryan Gaensler, Katie Grasha, Renée Hložek, Jackie Hodge, Jennifer Hoffman, Jarita Holbrook, Mark Huber, Nia Imara, Katie Jameson, Stephanie Juneau, Jeyhan Kartaltepe, Garrett (Karto) Keating, Evan Kirby, Jessica Kirkpatrick, Lauranne Lanz, Kelly Lockhart, Laura Lopez, Jessica Lu, Nicholas McConnell, Rosalie McGurk, Anne Medling, Betsy Mills, Chiara Mingarelli, Jorge Moreno, John Mulchaey, Drew Newman, Henry Ngo, Samaya Nissanke, Brian Nord, Kristina Nyland, Alison Peck, Daniel Perley, Alexandra Pope, Enrico Ramirez Ruiz, Megan Reiter, Jeff Rich, Jane Rigby, Joel Roediger, Anna Rosen, Gwen Rudie, Alex Rudolph, Nicole Cabrera Salazar, Joan Schmelz, Vicky Scowcroft, Marja Seidel, Keren Sharon, Aomawa Shields, Michael Strauss, Linda Strubbe, Johanna Teske, Ryan Trainor, Vivian U, Jackie Villadsen, Carolin Villforth, Lauren Weiss, Angie Wolfgang, Sarah Yost, Laura Zschaechner

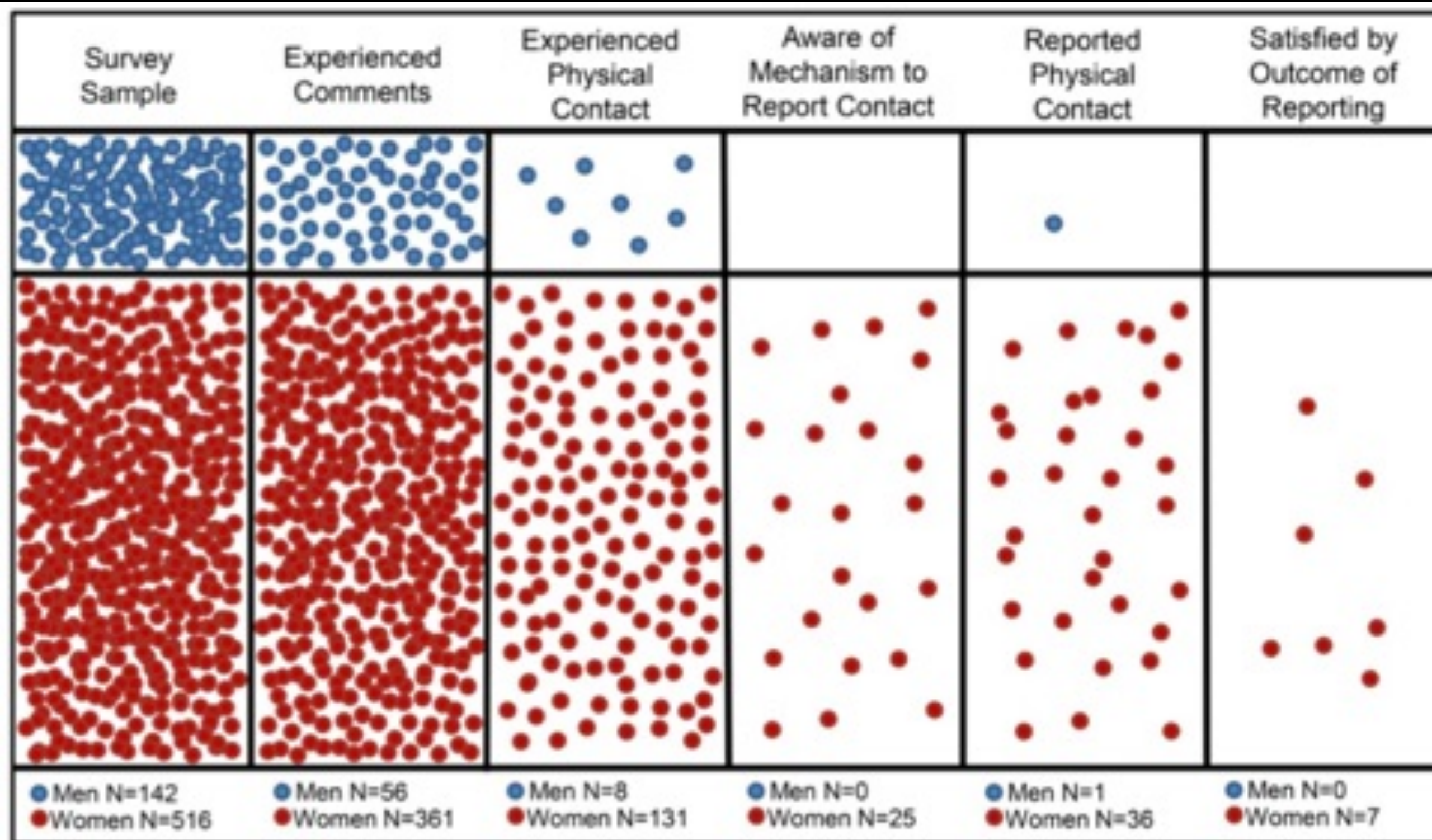


Figure 3. Visual representation of respondents to the survey, their experiences, and who were aware of, made use of, and were satisfied by mechanisms to report unwanted physical contact. Each circle represents one survey respondent. Area for men and women is representative of their relative proportion of survey respondents. Eight respondents declined to provide a dichotomous gender designation and are not represented on this graph.

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