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**REPORT ON THE  
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS  
SEXUAL HARASSMENT SURVEY  
AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY**

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## **Introduction**

This report describes the results of the 2019 Sexual Harassment Survey of Postdoctoral fellows administered at Vanderbilt University. (This report uses the term to refer to all individuals in postdoctoral positions. The full list of titles is available in Appendix 3.) Postdoctoral fellows' responses to Sexual Harassment Survey items provide data that will inform efforts to prevent and respond to gender harassment and related misconduct at Vanderbilt.

Vanderbilt University administered its first sexual harassment survey of postdoctoral fellows in spring 2019. This institutional effort was informed by findings and recommendations released in the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine Sexual Harassment of Women Consensus Study Report](#) in 2018. The Provost established the [Women of Vanderbilt Initiative](#) to develop progressive and innovative solutions and practices to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to succeed, no matter what gender they identify with. This postdoctoral fellows report is responsive to that initiative and will be provided to the established linked committees to further advise the Provost.

The Sexual Harassment Survey has several goals:

- Estimate the prevalence of sexual harassment of all forms for postdoctoral fellows at Vanderbilt.
- Assess the distribution of sexual harassment across groups of postdoctoral fellows.
- Compare postdoctoral fellows reports of sexual harassment to those of Vanderbilt University-employed faculty (who completed the same instrument), to those of staff (who will complete the same instrument at a later date), and of undergraduate and graduate students (who completed the 2019 AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct).
- Provide a baseline for future surveys of postdoctoral fellows.

This report summarizes the survey's findings along with background on the survey's design. The report does not seek to provide a definitive analysis of the results but rather a meaningful overview. The Office of Faculty Affairs and the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, both in the Office of the Provost, will work with and support school and college deans and the Provost's Sexual Misconduct Prevention Committee's efforts to respond to the survey, including reporting out more extensive analyses.

## **Methodology**

### **Selecting the Instrument**

In 2018, the Office of the Provost decided to survey postdoctoral fellows about sexual harassment using the same survey instrument that would be used for faculty. The Office for Faculty Affairs in the Office of the Provost, in collaboration with the leadership of the Provost's Steering Committee on Initiatives Focusing on the Status of Women (now the Provost's WAVE Council), determined that there was no well-established faculty survey of experiences of sexual harassment. This finding is consistent with that reported by the National Academies in their 2018 study (National Academies 2018, 39). The National Academies of Science, Medicine, and Engineering report, however, cited and analyzed results from longitudinal studies based on an instrument used by the U.S. military.

The Department of Defense has been a leader in researching sexual harassment, developing a behavioral instrument that has been used regularly by the U.S. military and other organizations (Lancaster 1999). The Department of Defense Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ-DoD) has been closely studied and evaluated by scholars (Fitzgerald et al. 1999). The standard SEQ-DoD has 23, five-option items divided into four subscales that measure four facets of sexual harassment: sexist hostility (sexist behavior), sexual hostility (crude or offensive behavior), unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Respondents are asked if they had experienced the listed behaviors in the past 12 months.

Vanderbilt chose to use a more recently developed version of the DoD survey known as the SEQ-DoD-s. University of Illinois psychologists developed a shorter version of the survey based on item response theory (Stark et al. 2012). The resulting 16-question survey retains four questions for each facet of sexual harassment. It drops questions that were found to be redundant or failed to solicit meaningful responses. (All cited sources are available in Appendix 2.)

### **Survey Content and Mode of Administration**

The survey measures four facets of sexual harassment: sexist behavior, crude or offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Each type of sexual harassment was measured using four questions. Respondents were asked to limit their answers to the last three years or since they arrived at Vanderbilt, whichever is shorter, and to only report incidents that have occurred at Vanderbilt and involved members of the Vanderbilt community. The full instrument (Appendix 1) was approved for implementation by the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The Sexual Harassment Survey was administered as a web survey by a third-party vendor, AnswerKey Technologies. Row-level, identifiable response data is maintained by AnswerKey Technologies exclusively to maintain anonymity. Each page of the web survey included links to general questions as well as resources such as University support centers and services and national rape crisis hotline

numbers. Web survey pages also included the third-party vendor's Help Desk phone number to aid participants who needed technical assistance.

The survey was administered to all full-time, active Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellows. A list of all titles included in the postdoctoral fellow designation can be found in Appendix 3. The Office of the Provost as well as other offices and academic leaders reached out to participants to encourage them to complete the survey. A news story as well as reminders about the survey were posted on MyVU. Participants were not incentivized at the University or school/college level to complete the survey.

### **Survey Procedures**

The Sexual Harassment Survey was launched on April 2, 2019. Email invitations to participate in the survey were sent to postdoctoral fellows' university email addresses through AnswerKey on the first day of data collection. An email from Susan Wentz, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, was sent prior to the first email notifying postdoctoral fellows about the survey. To prompt completion of the survey before the deadline, reminder emails were sent from AnswerKey, university deans, and vice provosts. The survey closed on April 30, 2019.

## Response Rates

Overall, 56.1% of postdoctoral fellows responded. This response rate is much higher than typical response rates for a survey of this type, and it provides greater confidence in the results as approximating the experiences of the population of postdoctoral fellows.

### Response Rate by Race/Ethnicity

The survey asked respondents to identify their race or ethnicity. Overall, 98.5% of postdoctoral fellow respondents answered to this question. Table 1 presents the distribution. In order to comply with federal regulations, the University asks postdoctoral fellows to report their race/ethnicity using categories provided by the federal government. Overall, 82.4% of Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellows answer the question. When they enrolled, postdoctoral fellows were able to select “foreign” rather than selecting race/ethnicity. Table 1 compares the demographics of respondents to the self-reported demographics of all postdoctoral fellows.

**Table 1. Postdoctoral Fellows Response Rate by Race/Ethnicity**

Racial/Ethnic Categories	Respondents	All Postdoctoral Fellows
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0%	0.0%
Asian	30.6%	3.4%
Black or African-American	5.7%	5.0%
Hispanic/Latinx	6.8%	2.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%
Two or More Races	1.1%	1.1%
White	55.9%	39.1%
Foreign National	<i>Not available</i>	48.9%

### Response Rate by Gender

The survey asked respondents to identify their gender. Overall, 98.9% of postdoctoral fellows responded to this question, and their answers are in Table 2. In order to comply with federal regulations, the University asks postdoctoral fellows to report their gender on a binary scale. Overall, 85.8% of Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellows answered the question. Table 2 compares the demographics of respondents to the self-reported demographics of all postdoctoral fellows.

**Table 2. Postdoctoral Fellows Response Rate by Gender**

Gender Categories	Respondents	All Postdoctoral Fellows
Man	45.4%	44.9%
Woman	54.3%	55.1%
Another Identity	0.4%	Not available

## Results: Rates of Prevalence by Type of Sexual Harassment

This section describes the results along the four facets of sexual harassment measured by the survey:

1. Sexist Behavior
2. Crude or Offensive Behavior
3. Unwanted Sexual Attention
4. Sexual Coercion

Each topic was measured using four questions. Respondents were asked to respond to each question according to the frequency of their experience of that type of behavior. Frequency was measured using a Likert scale of “Never”, “Once or Twice,” “Sometimes”, “Often”, or “Very Often.”

The first set of tables reports the behavior index scores for each of the four areas to allow comparison across the types of sexual harassment. (The behavior index score is based on an aggregate of all responses in a category.) The second set of tables focuses more closely on each type of sexual harassment, reporting out the frequency of responses for each question within a facet of sexual harassment.

The majority of postdoctoral fellows’ responses were that they had never experienced behaviors indicative of sexist behavior, crude or offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, or sexual coercion. Table 3 presents the behavioral index for each type based on all answers to the four questions within that type.

**Table 3. Distribution of Responses by Type of Sexual Harassment: All Postdoctoral Fellows**

<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally? (Percentages are based on aggregate responses to questions within each category.)</i>					
	Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
<b>Sexist Behavior</b>	87.2%	7.7%	4.0%	1.1%	0.1%
<b>Crude or Offensive Behavior</b>	93.5%	4.6%	1.3%	0.4%	0.2%
<b>Unwanted Sexual Attention</b>	97.4%	2.0%	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%
<b>Sexual Coercion</b>	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

*Vanderbilt University – Sexual Harassment Survey of Postdoctoral fellows 2019*

Postdoctoral fellows of color reported similar experiences as those reported by white postdoctoral fellows. (A respondent who identified as any race other than (or in addition to) white was classified as postdoctoral fellows of color.) Table 4 presents the results which show that sexist behaviors remains the most common type of sexual harassment.

<b>Table 4. Distribution of Responses by Type of Sexual Harassment: Postdoctoral Fellows of Color*</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
<i>(Percentages are based on aggregate responses to questions within each category.)</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
<b>Sexist Behavior</b>	91.9%	3.6%	3.4%	0.8%	0.2%
<b>Crude or Offensive Behavior</b>	96.0%	3.0%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%
<b>Unwanted Sexual Attention</b>	98.2%	0.8%	0.4%	0.6%	0.0%
<b>Sexual Coercion</b>	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

*\*Postdoctoral Fellows of Color is defined as all respondents who self-identified in this survey as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African-American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or Two or More Races.*

Table 5 presents the responses of women postdoctoral fellows who indicate somewhat higher rates of prevalence than the general group. More than 20% of women postdoctoral fellows’s responses were that at least one instance of sexist behavior by a Vanderbilt community member had occurred during the past three years, for example.

<b>Table 5. Distribution of Responses by Type of Sexual Harassment: Women Postdoctoral fellows</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
<i>(Percentages are based on aggregate responses to questions within each category.)</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
<b>Sexist Behavior</b>	79.9%	11.9%	6.7%	1.3%	0.2%
<b>Crude or Offensive Behavior</b>	92.5%	5.4%	2.0%	0.2%	0.0%
<b>Unwanted Sexual Attention</b>	96.5%	3.0%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%
<b>Sexual Coercion</b>	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%



## **Results: Distribution of Responses by Question**

Each type of sexual harassment was measured using four distinct behavioral questions. This section looks at each question organized by harassment category. The results are presented in two forms to allow for easier interpretation of the results. The first is a table with relative frequency of answers for each question. The first version of the table includes the responses for all postdoctoral fellows. The second table reports the results for women postdoctoral fellows who reported sufficiently different rates than those reported by men to merit a breakout by gender in this summary report. The second is a bar chart that identifies the statistical average in each prevalence category to identify areas in which postdoctoral fellows' responses approach the mean within that group.

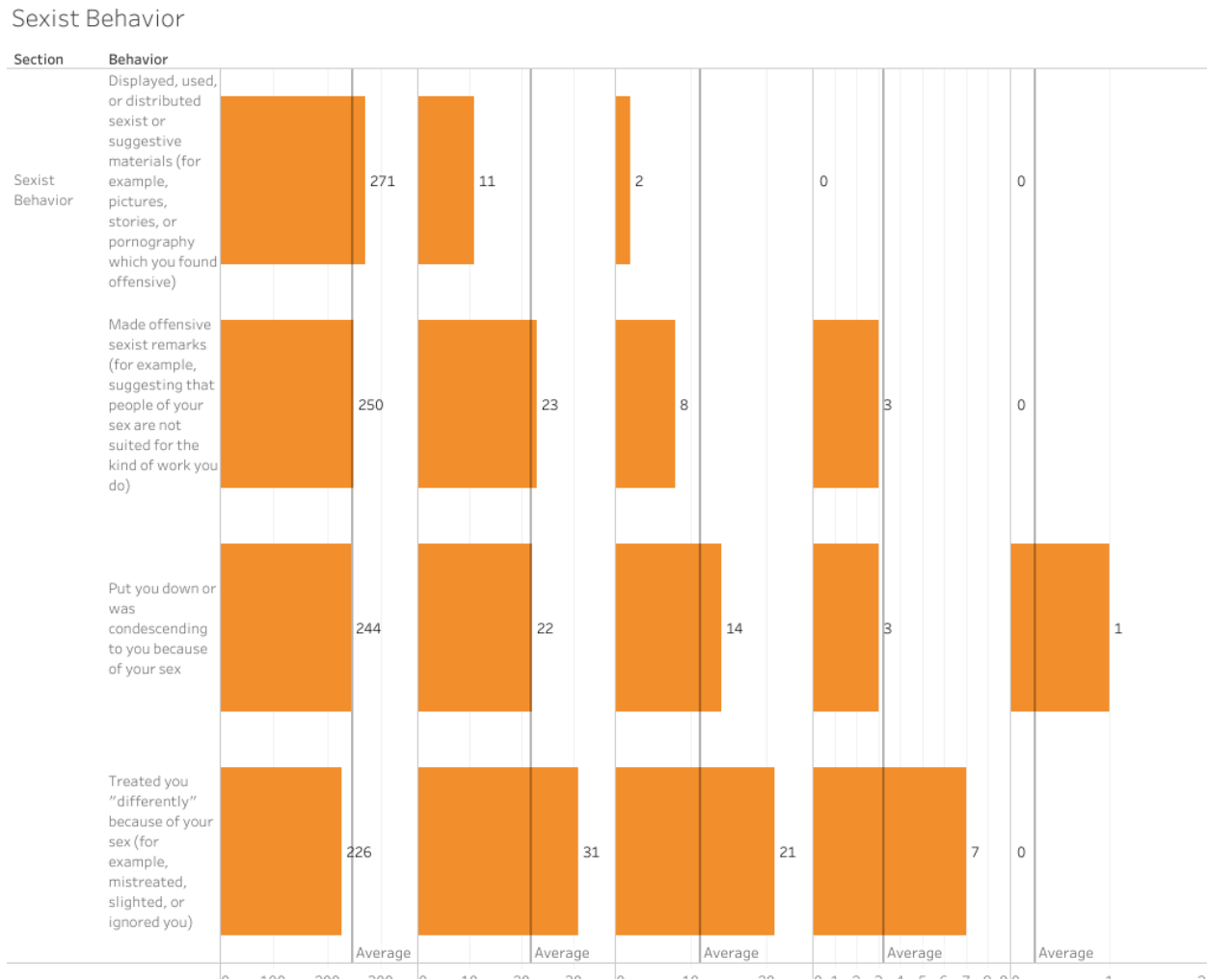
## Sexist Behavior Questions

Sexist behavior was measured by asking respondents about four specific behaviors as reflected in Table 6. The breakdown by question shows meaningful variability that can also be seen by looking at Figure 1. Table 6.1 presents answers from women postdoctoral fellows, showing that 44% of women had been treated differently because of their sex at least once during the past three years at Vanderbilt.

<b>Table 6. Distribution of Responses to Sexist Behavior Questions</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Treated you “differently” because of your sex (for example, mistreated, slighted, or ignored you)	79.3%	10.9%	7.4%	2.5%	0.0%
Made offensive sexist remarks (for example, suggesting that people of your sex are not suited for the kind of work you do)	88.0%	8.1%	2.8%	1.1%	0.0%
Displayed, used, or distributed sexist or suggestive materials (for example, pictures, stories, or pornography which you found offensive)	95.4%	3.9%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Put you down or was condescending to you because of your sex	85.9%	7.7%	4.9%	1.1%	0.4%

<b>Table 6.1. Distribution of Responses to Sexist Behavior Questions: Women Only</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Treated you “differently” because of your sex (for example, mistreated, slighted, or ignored you)	66.0%	17.6%	13.1%	3.3%	0.0%
Made offensive sexist remarks (for example, suggesting that people of your sex are not suited for the kind of work you do)	81.0%	13.7%	3.9%	1.3%	0.0%
Displayed, used, or distributed sexist or suggestive materials (for example, pictures, stories, or pornography which you found offensive)	95.4%	3.3%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Put you down or was condescending to you because of your sex	77.1%	13.1%	8.5%	0.7%	0.7%

Figure 1. Sexist Behavior



## Crude or Offensive Behavior Questions

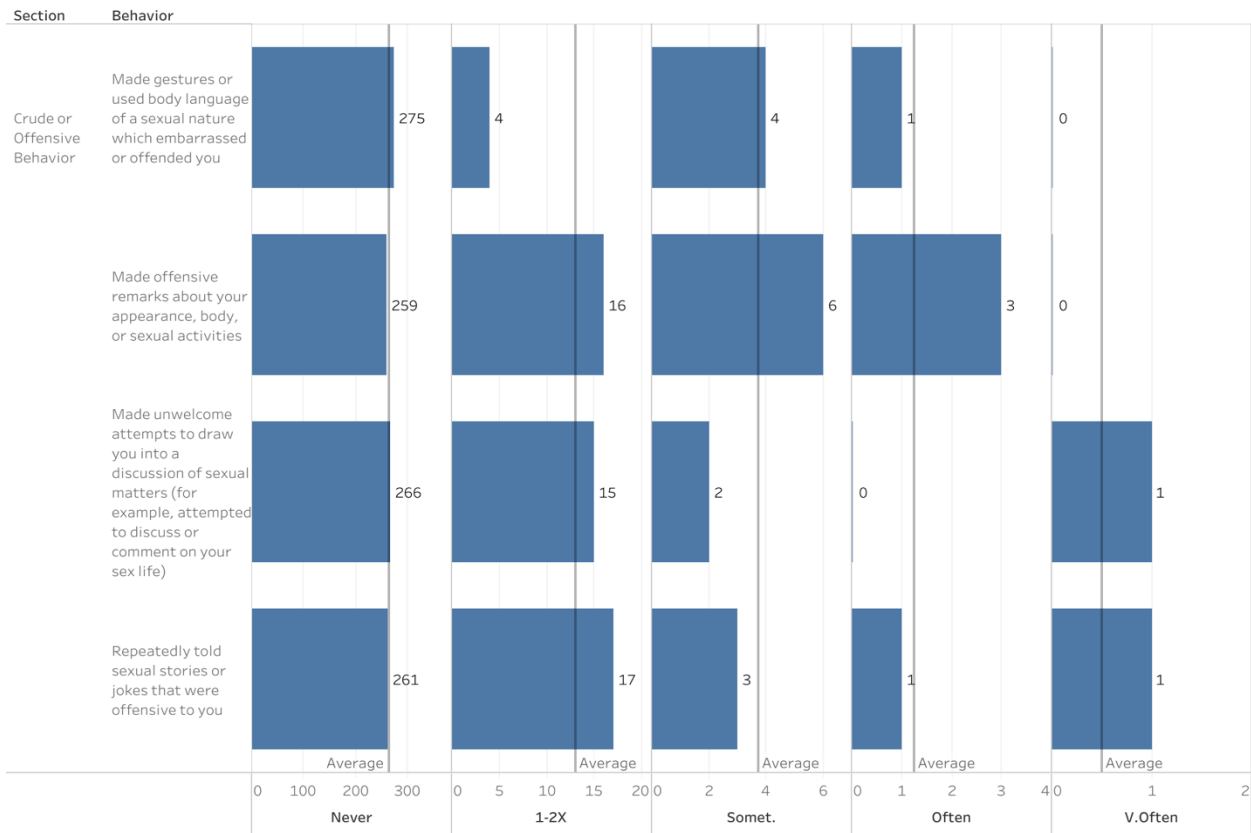
Crude or offensive behavior was measured by asking respondents about the four specific behaviors listed in Table 7. Figure 2 provides a graphical depiction. Women postdoctoral fellows’s responses are presented in Table 7.1.

<b>Table 7. Distribution of Responses to Crude or Offensive Behavior Questions</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to you	92.2%	6.0%	1.1%	0.4%	0.4%
Made unwelcome attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters (for example, attempted to discuss or comment on your sex life)	93.7%	5.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.4%
Made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities	91.2%	5.6%	2.1%	1.1%	0.0%
Made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature which embarrassed or offended you	96.8%	1.4%	1.4%	0.4%	0.0%

<b>Table 7.1 Distribution of Responses to Crude or Offensive Behavior Questions: Women Only</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to you	92.1%	6.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%
Made unwelcome attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters (for example, attempted to discuss or comment on your sex life)	93.5%	5.2%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities	87.6%	8.5%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature which embarrassed or offended you	96.7%	1.3%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Figure 2. Crude or Offensive Behavior Questions

Crude or Offensive Behavior



**Unwanted Sexual Attention Questions**

Unwanted sexual attention was measured by asking respondents about the four specific behaviors listed in Table 8. Figure 3 provides a graphical depiction of frequency against average. Women postdoctoral fellows’ responses are set forth in Table 8.1.

<b>Table 8. Distribution of Responses to Unwanted Sexual Attention Questions</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it	97.5%	1.8%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Continued to ask you for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though you said “No”	98.6%	1.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%
Touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable	94.3%	4.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Made unwanted attempts to stroke, fondle, or kiss you	99.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

<b>Table 8.1. Distribution of Responses to Unwanted Sexual Attention Questions: Women Only</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it	96.1%	3.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Continued to ask you for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though you said “No”	98.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable	92.7%	6.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Made unwanted attempts to stroke, fondle, or kiss you	99.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Unwanted Sexual Attention

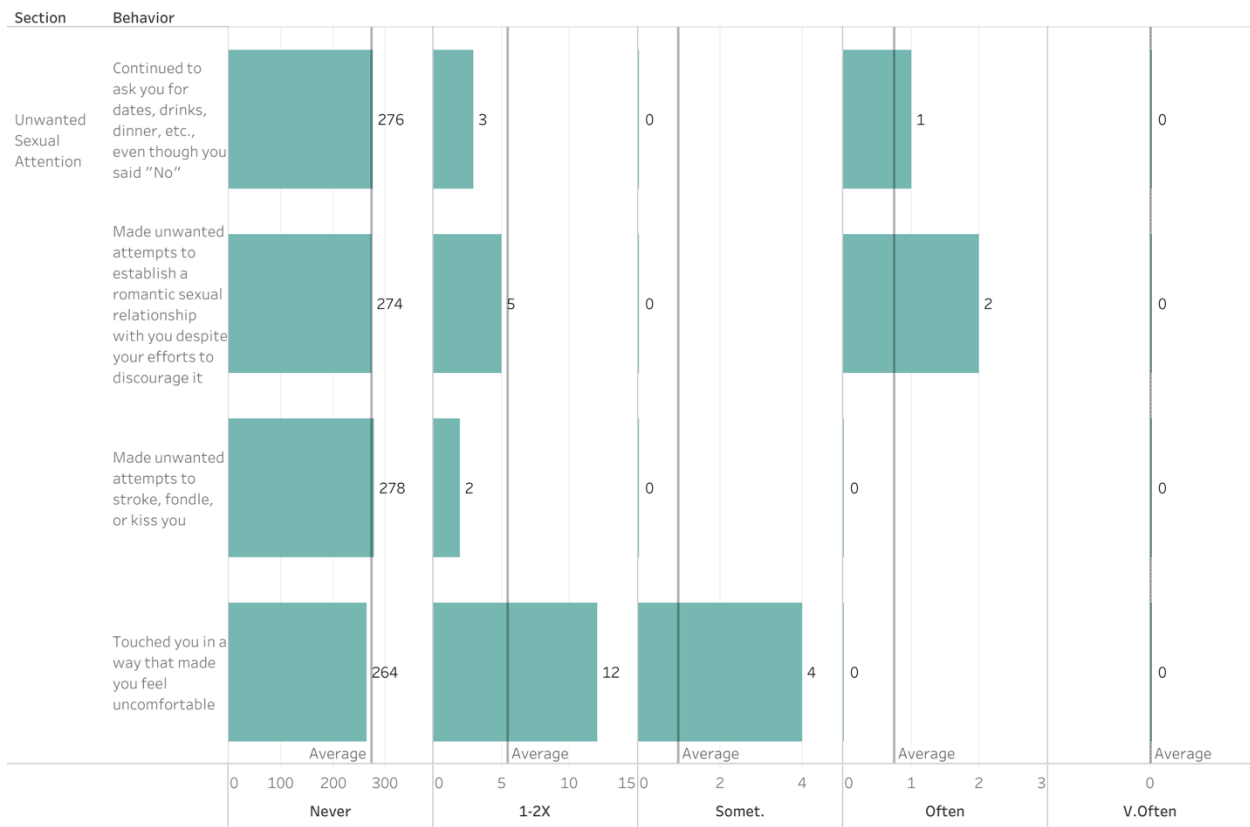


Figure 3. Unwanted Sexual Attention Questions

### Sexual Coercion Questions

Sexual coercion was measured by asking respondents about the four specific behaviors listed in Table 9. None of the postdoctoral fellows who completed the survey reported any instance of sexually coercive behavior.

<b>Table 9. Distribution of Responses to Sexual Coercion Questions</b>					
<i>In the past three years that you have been at Vanderbilt University (or, for those with less than 3 years of experience, since you arrived), has anyone at the university ever done the following to you personally?</i>					
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once or Twice</b>	<b>Some-times</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>
Made you feel like you were being bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Made you feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative (for example, by mentioning an upcoming review)	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Treated you badly for refusing to have sex	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%



## **Next Steps**

Implementing a sexual harassment survey and compiling this summary report are only the initial steps in the process of understanding and responding to sexual harassment of postdoctoral fellows at Vanderbilt. However, both are vitally important steps because they help to ensure that the University focuses its efforts on the demonstrated concerns and intentionally seeks to address them.

The response to the survey results will come from many leaders and groups across campus including:

- [The Provost's Sexual Misconduct Prevention Committee](#) (PSMPC) will advise the Provost and collaborate with colleges and schools to develop recommendations following the release of this report. The PSMPC supports evidence-based policies and practices for addressing and preventing all forms of sexual misconduct.
- Colleges and schools will also be able to use this information and recommendations to inform their own work at the school and departmental levels.
- Postdoctoral fellows can engage in dialogue about how the responses may reflect challenges they face in their own work and learning spaces.

Finally, the survey is part of a broader project at the University to consider the ways that gender harassment harm our postdoctoral fellows, faculty, staff, and students, and undermine our mission of learning, discovery, and service. That ongoing effort will strengthen the University as we move forward.