Introduction: Sexual Paranoia on Campus

Lately I've been thinking that future generations will look back on the recent upheavals in sexual culture on American campuses and see officially sanctioned hysteria. They'll wonder how supposedly rational people could have succumbed so easily to collective paranoia, just as we look back on previous such outbreaks (Salem, McCarthyism, the Satanic ritual abuse preschool trials of the 1980s) with condescension and bemusement. They'll wonder how the federal government got into the moral panic business, tossing constitutional rights out the window in an ill-conceived effort to protect women students from a rapidly growing catalogue of sexual bogeymen. They'll wonder why anyone would have described any of this as feminism when it's so blatantly paternalistic, or as "political correctness" when sexual paranoia doesn't have any predictable political valence. (Neither does sexual hypocrisy.) Restoring the most fettered versions of traditional femininity through the back door is backlash, not progress.

I didn't exactly mean to stumble into the middle of all this, and I hope that doesn't sound disingenuous. Sure, I like stirring up trouble—as a writer, that is—but believe me, I'm nobody's idea of an activist, quite the reverse. Despite being a left-wing feminist, something in me hates a slogan, even well-intentioned ones like "rape culture." Worse, I tend to be ironic—I *like* irony; it helps you think because it gives you critical distance on a thing. Irony doesn't sit very well in the current climate, especially when

it comes to irony *about* the current climate. Critical distance itself is out of fashion—not exactly a plus when it comes to intellectual life (or education itself). Feelings are what's in fashion. I'm all for feelings; I'm a standard-issue female, after all. But this cult of feeling has an authoritarian underbelly: feelings can't be questioned or probed, even while furnishing the rationale for sweeping new policies, which can't be questioned or probed either. (I speak from experience here). The result is that higher education has been so radically transformed that the place is almost unrecognizable.

There are plenty of transformations I'd applaud: more diversity in enrollments and hiring; need-blind admissions; progress toward gender equity. But personally, I dislike being told what I can and can't say. Beyond that, there are pretty important freedoms at stake that are worth fighting to preserve. Hence this book, which I suspect is going to test the limits of what can and can't be said about the sexual and intellectual situation on campus and beyond at the present moment. If this sounds like activism, well, I've been driven to it—entirely *against my own nature*—which shows just how bizarre it's gotten in higher education these days.

When I first heard, in March 2015, that students at the university where I teach had staged a protest march over an essay I'd written about sexual paranoia in academe, and that they were carrying mattresses and pillows, I was a bit nonplussed. For one thing, mattresses had become a symbol of student-on-student sexual assault—a Columbia University student became known as "mattress girl" after spending a year dragging a mattress around

campus in a performance art piece meant to protest the university's ruling in a sexual assault complaint she'd filed against a fellow student—whereas I'd been talking about the new consensual relations codes prohibiting professor-student dating. I suppose I knew the essay would be controversial—the whole point of writing it was to say things I believed were true (and suspected a lot of other people thought were true), but weren't being said for fear of repercussions. Still, I'd been writing as a feminist. And I hadn't sexually assaulted anyone. The whole thing seemed incoherent.

According to our student newspaper, the mattress carriers on my campus were marching to the university president's office with a petition demanding "a swift, official condemnation" of my article. One student said she'd had a "very visceral reaction" to it; another called it "terrifying." I'd argued that the new codes infantilized students and ramped up the climate of accusation, while vastly increasing the power of university administrators over all our lives, and here were students demanding to be protected by university higher-ups from the affront of someone's ideas—which seemed to prove my point.

The president announced that he'd consider the petition.

In retrospect, maybe it was shortsighted, but I hadn't actually thought about students reading the essay when I wrote it—who knew students read *The Chronicle of Higher Education*? I'd thought I was writing for other professors and administrators. Despite the petition, I assumed that academic freedom would prevail—for one thing, I'm tenured (thank god), at a research university. Also, I sensed the students weren't going to come off well in the court of public opinion, which proved to be the case. Marching against a published article wasn't a good optic—it smacked of book

burning, something Americans generally oppose, while conveniently illustrating my observation in the essay that students' assertions of vulnerability have been getting awfully aggressive in the past few years. Indeed, I was getting a lot of love on social media from all ends of the political spectrum, though one of the anti-PC brigade did email to tell me that, as a leftist, I should realize that these students were my own evil spawn. Yes, I was spending more time online than I should have—though, in fact, social media was my only source of information about the controversy: no one from the university had thought to let me know I was being marched on. (I wasn't teaching that quarter and was trying not to be around much.) I first learned about the events on campus from a journalist in New York.

Let me be the first to admit that being protested has its gratifying side: when the story started getting national coverage, I soon realized my writer friends were all jealous that I'd gotten marched on and they hadn't. I began shamelessly dropping it into conversation whenever possible—"Oh, students are marching against this thing I wrote," I'd grimace, in response to anyone's "How are you?" I briefly fantasized about running for the board of PEN, the international writers' organization devoted to protecting free expression.

Things seemed less amusing when I got an email from the university's Title IX coordinator informing me that two graduate students had filed Title IX complaints against me on the basis of the essay and "subsequent public statements"—this turned out to be a tweet—and that the university had retained a team of outside investigators to handle the case. There were various ominous warnings about keeping the matter confidential.

Perhaps you're wondering how an essay falls under the pur-

view of Title IX, the federal statute meant to address gender discrimination and funding for women's sports? I was wondering that myself, and continued to wonder during the seventy-two-day "investigation" that followed. I'll have plenty more to say about the Title IX process, but the answer, in brief, is that the culture of sexual paranoia I'd been writing about isn't confined to the sexual sphere. It's fundamentally altering the intellectual climate in higher education as a whole, to the point where ideas are construed as threats—writing an essay became "creating a chilling environment," according to my accusers—and freedoms most of us used to take for granted are being whittled away or disappearing altogether. Sexual paranoia has converted the Title IX bureaucracy into an insatiable behemoth, bloated by its own federal power grab, though protests are few because—what are you, in favor of rape culture or something? Also, paranoia is a formula for intellectual rigidity, and its inroads on campus are so effectively dumbing down the place that the traditional ideal of the university—as a refuge for complexity, a setting for the free exchange of ideas—is getting buried under an avalanche of platitudes and fear.

Speaking of dumbing down, and I don't wish to be unkind to either my accusers or my employers, but anyone with half a brain cell could have predicted my response to that Title IX letter in my in-box: an overpowering urge to blow the lid off it all. So shortly later, I wrote a second essay, this one about the Title IX investigation process and my experiences as an accusee (*respondent* is the official term). No professor had previously gone public about a Title IX case, so there was a bit of a tempest—words like *Kafkaesque* and *unconstitutional* got thrown around a lot in the media and online, though it turns out you don't actually have

constitutional rights at a private university, which was among the many surprising things I'd come to learn.

That was just the start. It turned out that writing about my case put me on the receiving end of scores of desperate letters and confidential documents relating to *other* people's Title IX cases. It turns out that rampant accusation is the new norm on today's campus; the place is a secret *cornucopia* of accusation, especially when it comes to sex. Including merely *speaking* about sex. My in-box became a clearinghouse for depressing and infuriating tales of overblown charges, capricious verdicts, and frightening bureaucratic excess. I was introduced to an astonishing netherworld of accused professors and students, rigged investigations, closed-door hearings, and Title IX officers run amok. This was a world I'd previously known nothing about, because no one on campus knows anything about it, or no one who hasn't yet been brought up on charges for something. And those in the know are too terrified to speak out because the complaints typically arrive with demands for confidentiality and threats that speaking about the complaints will result in potential job loss or expulsion.

Despite the endless talk about unbridled leftism on campuses, campus political culture of the moment throws all traditional left-right distinctions up for grabs. After I got marched on, I became, for a time, a darling on the right—well, a certain libertarian flange of the right—who liked that I'd stood up to "political correctness," even if I was untrustworthy on every other count. Please note that when someone like me gets lauded on the right, politics as we know it is officially incomprehensible. So let's leave the politics of the campus situation an open question for the mo-

ment. Straightforward political explanations are insufficient, and the usual alliances don't hold—we're in the terrain of hysteria, and all bets are off.

Let me attempt to sketch the backdrop of the hysteria, for anyone who hasn't spent time on an American campus lately. There are two conflicting stories about sex at the moment. The first story is all about license: hooking up, binge drinking, porn watching—my students talk knowingly about "anal," and funnily about "dormcest" . . . they're junior libertines, nothing sexual is alien to them.

Layered on top of that is the other big story of the moment: sex is dangerous; it can traumatize you for life.

It's not a happy combination.

For my generation, coming of age in the all-too-brief interregnum after the sexual revolution and before AIDS turned sex into a crime scene replete with perpetrators and victims—back when sex, even when not so great or when people got their feelings hurt, fell under the category of life experience—words like *pleasure* and *liberation* got tossed around a lot. But campus culture has moved on and now the metaphors veer toward the extractive rather than additive—sex takes something *away* from you, at least if you're a woman: your safety, your choices, your future. It's contaminating: you can catch trauma, which, like a virus, never goes away. You don't hear much talk about liberation anymore; the slogans are all about sexual assault and other encroachments: "Stop Rape Culture," "No Means No," "Control Yourselves, Not Women."

Sexual assault *is* a reality on campus, though not exactly a new

one. But despite all the recent attention and the endless flurry of statistics, it's still an incredibly underexamined reality, permeated by speech taboos and barbed-wire fences meant to deter intellectual intruders. We're never going to decrease sexual assault on campus—a goal I assume everyone shares—if we can't have open conversations about it. Having control over your body is, especially for women, a learned skill; it requires education. It also requires a lot more honesty about the complicated sexual realities hiding behind the slogans than is currently permissible. My question becomes: what contradictions are we not supposed to notice, hiding in plain sight behind those large No Trespassing signs?

Let me venture a few possibilities. To begin with, the endangerment story produces huge blind spots, which are reproduced in every new policy and code supposedly meant to reduce unwanted sex. The policies are ineffectual because the endangerment story and the realities of sexual assault are two entirely separate things. That's blind spot number one. About those realities: the underlying gender dynamic is blind spot number two—the dynamic between men and women, I mean. Men *and* women. What I'm saying is that policies and codes that bolster traditional femininity—which has always favored stories about female endangerment over stories about female agency—are the *last* thing in the world that's going to reduce sexual assault, which is the argument at the heart of this book.*

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* The issues are predominantly male-female, though same-sex relationships can be subject to the same forces—in fact, a case between two male students (*Doe v. Brandeis*) may affect how many other future student cases are adjudi-

Whether or not college students are actually *having* sex any differently from generations past, clearly the emphasis has changed. Shifting the stress from pleasure to danger and vulnerability not only changes the prevailing narrative, it changes the way sex is experienced. We're social creatures, after all, and narrative is how we make sense of the world. If the prevailing story is that sex is dangerous, sex is going to feel threatening more of the time, and anything associated with sex, no matter how innocuous (a risqué remark, a dumb joke) will feel threatening.

Teaching under these conditions can feel like a tightrope walk. A few years ago, I was having a conversation with a class about a movie—*The Opposite of Sex*, fittingly enough. I teach film. A student (female) made a comment assailing the female lead's poor sexual choices, pronouncing, a bit Cotton Mather-ishly, upon the character's irresponsibility and sexual risk-taking, a judgment with which most of the class concurred. My students are all writing screenplays and making films, and the consensus startled me: first, because I spend a lot of energy trying to get students to understand that moralizing about characters isn't a great way to go about writing interesting ones—characters aren't *supposed* to be

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cated. Doe, a male student, was found guilty of sexual misconduct after his boyfriend of nearly two years, "J.C.," charged (six months after their breakup) that numerous instances of sex during their relationship had been nonconsensual. Brandeis's "special examiner" found Doe guilty of "violence" toward J.C.—effectively conflating violence with "virtually any form of unwanted sexual activity," said a federal judge in allowing the case to proceed. The examiner even found that John's kissing J.C. while he was asleep constituted sexual misconduct, because a person who's sleeping can't give consent. The judge used the term *logical fallacies* about such conclusions, though they're par for the course in campus adjudications these days.

upstanding citizens—and second, because we all knew that some percentage of the class (or their peer group, anyway) was making similar sexual choices not infrequently, which is why Plan B birth control is available on demand at the student health service.

I know this because I probably get to know my students better than a lot of professors do. One reason is that they're frequently pillaging their own lives for material. Often at the end of the quarter, a student volunteers the information that a script or film was autobiographical, though I generally don't ask. My teaching method, such as it is, mostly involves talking about movies and hashing over students' creative ideas with them, so they're doing a majority of the talking, and I'm hearing what they think about love, sex, morality, and so on. I wouldn't claim to be the world's greatest teacher, but there are students who like my approach (some do, some don't) and who take multiple classes with me; these kids I get to know especially well. It puts me in a fairly good position to compare the mind-set of at least this subsection of the student population with mine at their age, and the differences in attitude continually startle me, especially when it comes to the propensity for moralizing.

My own education was in art schools, where the pedagogical style was admittedly pretty casual. The teachers who influenced me the most were gnomic oddballs. Some of them were brutal—I recall one guy, a painter, yelling "This is shit!" during a critique, though thankfully not at me. I also recall drunken parties at his loft—students and teachers getting plastered together was a regular event. You didn't feel your teachers were remote, all-powerful beings—they were messy, opinionated, depressed, monumentally flawed. We took them seriously because of their ideas, not their institutional roles. *Safety*, the watchword of

the contemporary campus, would have been a term of derision for us, reserved for a painting that matched the sofa.

I recall another teacher, a Marxist-Freudian bodybuilder who I'm pretty sure never published anything and was reputedly sleeping his way through a swathe of the student population, who influenced me more than any teacher before or since. The ideas I first encountered in his Modern Art History class shaped the entirety of my intellectual repertoire. One day I got up my nerve and asked him out; he said no. I was mortified, but managed to gather what small shred of self-regard remained and keep going to class. I wrote a wildly speculative final paper he praised effusively, one that contained arguments I'm still working out to this day.

Among the many things wrong with the sex-as-danger preoccupation on campuses now—and here I'm speaking as someone teaching on the creative side of the curriculum—is that zealous boundary-drawing and self-protective preciousness don't augur well for the imaginative life. Can creativity be taught? Probably not, though I do think you can encourage the conditions that improve its chances, and defensiveness isn't one of those conditions. But I don't preach about such things to my students; I generally just try to figure out what they're struggling to say and help them push it further. At most, I confine myself to pointing out (tactfully, I hope) when I think they're coasting on clichés.

My class's moralizing about the poor sexual choices in *The Opposite of Sex* seemed to be such an occasion. Moralizing isn't thinking; it comes too easily, it's too smug (especially coming from moralizing libertines). I'd wanted them to see how the surprise pregnancy motored the plot, rather than just denounce the character. After they were done trashing her, I said, attempting

to offer another angle, "Gosh, I feel sorry for you guys. When I was in school we thought about sex in terms of pleasure; your generation seems to think about it all in terms of risk."

Another student (male) exclaimed, "Well, yeah, sex can kill you!"

I've thought about that remark a lot since then. It was a great lesson in the obvious: which is that this generation of students, millennials, is also the first post-AIDS generation. God knows what horrors they've been exposed to in their Sex Ed classes—necessarily, I suppose, but still, with what effects? Not vastly increased levels of self-acuity, and though we're all stragglers when it comes to sexual honesty, I suspect, from what I've observed, that this generation has it far worse (possibly contributing to the stratospheric levels of binge drinking, which we'll be getting to—who wouldn't want to shed a few layers of doomsaying on the weekends?).

Obviously there's nothing new about a youthful education in the hazards of sex—I recall disgusting slide shows of syphilitic sex organs in my own junior high Sex Ed class—as each aging generation is all too pleased to educate the next one in the standard perils: pregnancy, disease, shame, spiritual corruption, and so on. The danger of sex may be a recurring cultural script, but what's still worth pointing out is how it shapes gender roles, and colors how gender is lived, especially for women. Women are situated differently from men when it comes to sexual danger (though, according to social science research, we typically also *feel* ourselves to be far more vulnerable to sexual danger than we are—and I can think of no better way to subjugate women than to convince us that assault is around every corner). Still, for my generation of women, there was hardly the same death knell tolling in the background.

For us, post-Pill and after second-wave feminism had made at least a few provisional inroads into female shame and the double standard, sex wasn't exactly uncomplicated, but even when it was bad (as it often was), it was still educational. Even today's cardinal danger, sex with teachers, which many of us dabbled in without too many horrible consequences, was educational. A high percentage of the women I know have a teacher or two in their past; most, as far as I can tell, regard these experiences fondly. Or, even when feelings are mixed, it wasn't some sort of awful trauma. When I look back on it now, I wonder who I'd have become without all the bad sex, the flawed teachers, and the liberty to make mistakes. I got to take risks, which was a training ground for later creative and intellectual risks, precisely because we didn't *think* of sex as a harm.

Just to be clear, I'm not trying to say that my generation's story about pleasure was any *truer* than this one's story about danger. There's no singularly true way of thinking about sex and no direct way of experiencing it: how we think about sex is always going to be filtered through whatever shifting set of cultural suppositions prevails. Call this "sexual ideology" or "sexual culture," but there aren't fixed truths about sex, or reliable facts. All we have are fluctuating emotional colors and tendencies presenting themselves in the guise of truths and facts. And no matter how many statistics and percentages get thrown around to buttress the fantasy that there's some "objective" way of knowing the truth of sex, nothing's more unreliable than sexual statistics—humans are horrendous at sexual self-reporting, to begin with. Everyone lies about sex, though maybe every generation lies about sex differently, or so I've been thinking of late. All we can say is that the "truth" of sex has been different at every

point in history, that every era believes its own sexual narrative to be the truth of sex, and at this point the dominant narrative, on the nation's campuses anyway, is all about *hazard.*

The problem is that this shift in sexual culture isn't confined to sex; it's more like a land grab, gobbling up vast swathes of real estate along the way, including the very definition of what it is to be a woman. When it comes to sexual culture, obviously each generation bills itself as an improvement over the last. No doubt the slogans about pleasure and liberation were our little lies about sex—the realities were obviously a lot thornier, especially for women. But today's hazard story, too, comes with its own evasions, namely the blind spot about women's agency. In a sexual culture that emphasizes female violation, endangerment, and perpetual vulnerability ("rape culture"), men's power is taken as a given instead of interrogated: men need to be policed, women need to be protected. If rape is the norm, then male sexuality is by definition predatory; women are, by definition, prey. Regulators thus rush in like rescuing heroes, doing what it takes to fend off the villains—*whatever* it takes, since when women are imperiled, vigilantism is the better part of heroism. At least, that's the tradition, a tradition with a lot of racial baggage in the American context, it's worth mentioning—in fact a founding American myth. (See John Ford's *The Searchers*, with John Wayne exemplifying just how psychosexually convoluted the whole rescuing-women enterprise can be.)

And here's where I say, as a feminist: this is terrible for women. We *all*, men and women both, want the law to protect us from unequal strength and exercises of violence: the brute can't be allowed to rule because he's larger or stronger. The law bridges the gap in bodily differences to provide equity between citizens. But

why treat sexual assault as the paradigmatic female experience when there are plenty of other female experiences in which women's embodied, physiological differences from men materially impede gender equity? As a feminist, I want to see the government step in to remedy those, too. I don't mean just pay equity, the conventional demand. I mean making child care and maternity costs free, which would obviously be the fastest path to real equity for the greatest number of women. This is an issue you hear pretty much zero about on American campuses these days, by the way. Instead, all historical inequities between the genders have been relocated to the sexual sphere and displaced onto sexual danger, with paranoia substituting for sustained thought or historical perspective.

When I say "substituting for sustained thought," here's an example. I spoke with a young man I'll call Simon, until recently a student at a Big Ten university, who, following a brief closed-door hearing, was "excluded" for two years (expelled, effectively) for the use of "emotional and verbal coercion" in a sexual situation involving his then girlfriend and an ambivalent blow job on her part. Emotional and verbal coercion means that he asked her for a blow job, and she complied, after first demurring. There was no finding of physical force. He was eighteen at the time, a freshman. The girlfriend was a year older. He said she verbally assented; she said she didn't.* When he realized she wasn't into it,

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* I'm reporting the accuser's side of the story based on the university's report (I had access to a redacted version). I didn't interview the accuser in this case or the other cases I discuss, which would have been impossible—any respondent who gave me the name or contact information for a complainant would be subject to retaliation charges. The privacy constraints are one thing

he halted things, he says, after thirty seconds or so. He thought he was being flirtatious when he'd asked for oral sex, he told me with embarrassment—this was not someone brimming with sexual confidence. There had been previous sex between the two, and previous blow jobs; the charge of coercion came months later, following a breakup.

The ruling was that he should have known that consent had to be "voluntary, present and ongoing." For campus officials to find this kid responsible for "emotional coercion" not only means prosecuting students for the awkwardness of college sex, it also brands an eighteen-year-old a lifelong sex criminal—all college applications now ask if a student has been found responsible for "behavioral misconduct" at a previous institution, and demand the details. He assumes he'll never get into another school and is adamant he'll never return to the previous one, even if he could. His life is wrecked, he feels.

If incidents like these are being labeled sexual assault, then we need far more discussion about just how capacious this category is becoming, and why it's in anyone's interests. Including women's. What a lot of retrogressive assumptions about gender are being promulgated under the guise of combating assault! Not only was the woman's agency erased, note the unarticulated premise of the finding: women students aren't men's equals in *emotional* strength or self-possession, and require teams of campus administrators to

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that make Title IX difficult to write about (also so impervious to oversight). Those interested in reading more from the point of view of accusers might consult Annie E. Clark and Andrea L. Pino's *We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out* (Holt, 2016).

step in and remedy the gap. Another unarticulated premise: sex is injurious and the woman had sustained an injury in that thirty seconds, one serious enough to require official remediation. My question: how much are such unexamined premises contributing to the ballooning number of sexual allegations, and to women's own self-identification as perpetually injured parties?

None of this is to diminish the reality of sexual assault. At the same time, we seem to be breeding a generation of students, mostly female students, deploying Title IX to remedy sexual ambivalences or awkward sexual experiences, and to adjudicate relationship disputes post-breakup—and campus administrators are allowing it. If this is what feminism on campus has come to, then seriously, let's just cash it in and start over, because this feminism is broken. It has exactly nothing to do with gender equity or emancipating women—a cynic might say it actually has more to do with extending the reach of campus bureaucracy into everyone's lives. It's a vast, unprecedented transfer of power into the hands of the institution. But whatever the agenda, and whoever the secret beneficiaries, hard-fought rights, namely the right for women to be treated as consenting adults in erotic matters, are being handed back on a platter.

The problem, of course, is that it's also all far messier than this. There are plenty of cases where unequivocal sexual assaults happen and the system fails to deal with it—especially when it comes to athletes and frats—even as there are shocking prosecutorial excesses in other instances. There's no coherence to the situation. But weaponizing Title IX isn't going to fix the sexual assault problem. If anything's going to make a dent, it's education, and the educational system is failing to educate anyone, largely because speaking honestly about sexual realities has become taboo.

Speaking of realities: a few additional thoughts on the term *rape culture* and why I can't sign on. The idea of rape culture has become the campus equivalent of 9/11: in both cases, horrible real events take on mythic proportions, becoming resistant to precise analysis. On campus, the term *rape culture*, like the term *terrorism*, has become the rhetoric of emergency. Fear becomes the guideline, promulgating more fear. The problem is that fear rhetoric obfuscates more than it explicates; nevertheless, officialdom leaps to action. Hawks demand an over-response, such as going to war on false pretenses. The failed war exacerbates the fears, which becomes the rationale for further expanding the security state: vast expenditures, increased layers of bureaucracy, surveillance, secret renditions, summary justice—like expelling a freshman for "emotional coercion."

The term *carceral feminism* has been used to describe the hawkish security state swerve in social policy on women's issues: more policing (*carceral* derives from *incarceration*), more regulation, an eagerness to trade away civil liberties for illusory promises of safety, and the same complacent failures of analysis. Carceral feminism—the term was invented by Barnard sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein—is pretty much the guiding spirit in campus policy, and it's a profoundly conservative, law-and-order spirit, with resources diverted away from education and toward punishment. Even if no one's going around wearing little flag lapel pins, the idea that this is some kind of left-wing plot strikes me as short on . . . intelligence.

It's long been true of mainstream American feminism that the most supposedly radical factions have been closet conservatives,

dedicated to recycling the most conventional versions of feminine virtue and delicacy. There have always been puritanical versions of feminism competing with more emancipatory versions. The so-called radical feminists of the 1980s—the designation was always a misnomer—were short-sighted bluenoses, even aligning themselves with Christian conservatives to fight the demon pornography (just as some first-wave feminists joined with prohibitionists to fight the demon rum). Breaking with the radicals, "liberal feminists" were the faction focused on pay equity and workplace issues. The problem was that having also broken with the male-dominated New Left (not without good reason: they tended to be jerks to women), class and race mostly dropped out of the discussion. While European feminists with a social democratic tradition behind them were demanding and getting subsidized day care, winning resources from the state and employers, their American liberal counterparts favored "networking" (more recently, "leaning in"). The new goal: breaking into the ranks of corporate CEOs. Result: every American mother still has to figure out for herself what to do with the kids while she's at work, since given the new winner-take-all economy, it takes two or more jobs to support a family.

Meanwhile, a new generation of student activists, legitimately dissatisfied with the legacies of liberal feminism, rather than looking to revitalize the socialist or left-emancipatory traditions, are instead joining arms with campus administrators as the fast track to empowerment. But even if the rhetoric borrows from radicalism, the substance is far from it. Ah, look: there's the familiar anti-porn keenness for female captivity narratives in an updated guise. Sure, the updated version nixes the anti-porn agenda per se, which would seem old-fashioned—even suburban

housewives these days claim to love porn—though the shopworn tale of women held hostage by male sexual impulses still gets a lot of play.

How is it that the most reactionary versions of feminism are the ones enjoying the greatest success on campuses? For one thing, those are the versions reaping the institutional support, not least in Washington. Perhaps there's also something reassuringly familiar—at least timeless—about these tales of female peril, even amidst the supposed sexual free-for-all of hookup culture.

So all this was in the back of my mind when the *Chronicle* asked me to write an essay on campus sexual politics. Mulling it over, I recalled the notice that had arrived by email a year or so before (out of the blue, it seemed), banning all dating, romantic, or sexual relations between undergraduates and faculty members, consensual or not. Relationships between faculty and grad students were described as "problematic" and though not outright prohibited, had to be disclosed to your department chair, if and when such a relationship commenced.

I'd felt a surge of annoyance on receipt of this email, not that I especially wanted to date students. There were already harassment codes on the books prohibiting nonconsensual relations or contact, so why prohibit consensual activity? It struck me as antifeminist, yet another puncture to female autonomy—even though the language was gender-neutral, I was pretty sure it was women these codes meant to protect, including from their own desires and ambivalences.

Before the email's arrival, students and professors could romance whomever we wished; the next day we were off-limits to

one another—verboten, traife, dangerous . . . though perhaps therefore all the more alluring? (Not something the regulators seem to have considered.) It all seemed massively hypocritical, given the legions of professors who've dated a student or two in their day. More than a few female professors, too; in fact, I'm one of them. Don't ask for details—it's one of those things it now behooves one to be reticent about, lest you be branded a sex fiend.

And what about the legions of professors actually *married* to their former students, including a few in my own department? I mean, you can barely throw a stone on most campuses around the country without hitting a few dozen examples. I confess I felt a little sorry for them all: once respectable citizens, leaders in their fields, department chairs, deans, more than a few college presidents, transformed by the new regulatory zeal into abusers of power *avant la lettre*, even though professor-student romances were once practically an educational norm. And think how their kids must feel! A friend of mine is the offspring of such a coupling—does she look at her parents a little differently now?

Needless to say, these are not questions being pondered on campus, since the subject can't be openly spoken of. I noticed none of these "mixed" couples were coming forward to speak out against the new codes, by the way, putting this newly outlawed sexual minority more or less where gays were pre-Stonewall. Student-teacher relationships: the love that dare not speak its name.

I suppose it's a universal thing about sex (as I think anthropologists have variously observed) that it requires prohibitions, even if the particulars of what's permitted and prohibited keep shifting around. As we see on campus: on the one hand, all sorts of practices and identities not so long ago regarded as outré (transgenderism, polyamory, BDSM, and queerness of every stripe) are

newly ascendant, whereas practices that were not so long ago the norm (professor-student dating) have suddenly been recoded as criminal enterprises. Along with awkward sex, ambivalent sex—even the wrong eye contact can get you brought up on complaints at present. I recently heard about a male grad student filing a Title IX complaint against a female professor for dancing "too provocatively" at an off-campus party. All of which is worth some intellectual analysis, an activity you used to encounter with regularity on campuses. In lieu of analysis, we get sweeping regulations and faculty silence. Maybe there are isolated pockets of opposition, but for the most part dissenters are keeping a low profile, like skeptics during the Inquisition.

Another of the weirder features of campus life now is witnessing a generation of students demanding *more* regulation over their lives from the administration, in contrast to the demands of previous generations of activists that campus officials get *out* of their lives. Our rebellions were more straightforwardly Oedipal: overthrow everything, especially the fucking administration. (Watergate was still a cultural landmark.) In my own first semester of college long ago, students staged a protest to oust the college president, who was regarded as a venal megalomaniac; after a no-support vote by the faculty shortly later, he handed in his resignation. *That's* how you deal with overreaching administrators, I'd always assumed. Of course, today's college students are also the generation known to be best friends with their parents, as many of my own students are, chatting with them multiple times a day, as far as I can tell ("Love you, Mom, talk later" one frequently hears students chirping into their cells as they rush into class), so maybe they regard administrators with more benevolence than my era did.

The fiction of benevolent officialdom requires a certain historical amnesia, particularly when it comes to sexual minorities. Not long ago a gay male professor wrote to tell me he'd been accused by a former advisee, also male—there'd been a falling out between them—of groping a female grad student at a party. The professor testified at his Title IX hearing that he hadn't touched a woman sexually in thirty-two years, but the entirety of his sexuality (and every other foible, along with his teaching—had there been risqué remarks in the classroom?) was now under the institutional microscope; he was eventually fired. I couldn't help reflecting that this was unfolding around the same time that movie audiences were weeping piously over the story of the hounded gay mathematician Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game* (who committed suicide after being subjected to chemical castration to "treat" his homosexuality), while oblivious to the houndings playing out on our nation's campuses.

The history of sexual outlawry is one reason it's dispiriting to find student activists, all assiduously pro-sex and genderqueer (at least sporting a lot of piercings and other insignias of nonconformity), joining arms with campus bureaucrats to demand wider prosecutorial nets for professorial sex offenders. Apparently no one has mentioned to them how many of the professors being caught in these widening nets are, in fact, queer—or suspected of being so, anyway. A woman professor I met while visiting another campus revealed she'd been brought up on Title IX complaints for making "suspicious eye contact" with two female graduate students, staring at one's chest, and whispering in their ears. It so happened that the whispering took place in a library; her field was library science. She told the story in a funnily bitter way, but it was probably not so funny at the time. She was

summoned to a three-hour meeting, not told what the charges were or who had complained, and then not allowed to set foot on campus for two months while the case was in progress. In other words, she was treated like a sex offender ordered to stay away from playgrounds. Perhaps you're thinking she was one of those lesbian predators who prowl academe in search of luscious young prey? Perhaps her students were thinking so, too—she does have short hair and an authoritative bearing, but is as straight as they come, at least according to her. (I didn't ask, she volunteered the information.)

One centrally placed queer theorist of my acquaintance, always in the know when it comes to professional gossip, tells me that more gay and queer than straight professors are the subject of formal complaints. Who knows? It's not as though we have data on any of this, since it all takes place in secret. Her point was that gay and queer professors invariably become targets of projection for sexually confused students, though from what I've been learning, no particular group has a monopoly on sexual confusion.

Terms such as *coddled* have been thrown around a lot lately about this generation of students, and it's true that officialdom is abundantly *there* for students (especially at pricier places), though why shouldn't they get concierge service given the rising price of tuition? Of course a large reason tuition costs are climbing is the growth of officialdom. The ratio of administrators to students has nearly doubled since 1975, political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg reports in *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters*, while the ratio of faculty to stu-

dents has stayed constant. These administrative hires often have no academic background, yet they're the ones making policies and setting the tenor of the place. They're also typically paid a lot more than faculty.

When the students gathered to protest my essay, three administrators (the dean of students, the director of student conduct and conflict resolution, and the coordinator of sexual violence response services) joined the group and, according to the campus newspaper, lauded the students for taking a stand. When I was in school—yes, I know the phrase makes me sound like a geezer—the old people in charge of things weren't in cahoots with our sexual narrative, which at least provided something bracing to rebel against: an antithesis, some contestation. Now old people and young ones (at least the more vocal among the young) all seem to share the same proprieties.

It does make me grateful to have been educated in a time when the holders of institutional power weren't regarded as quite so benign. Nor were the institutions themselves so mollifying, so ambitious about fixing our lives. I wonder if being in school now would have left me feeling less freedom to act on the world, perhaps more beholden to authority? I feel a touch of regret on behalf of my students, the women especially, whose freedoms have become so much more straitened, in proportion to the fears and assuagements of the times.

Though even saying this puts me out of step with campus verities. In the student-as-consumer model, we're frequently urged to see the world from a student-eye point of view, to substitute their wisdom for our own. High on the activist-administrator joint agenda is reeducating the professoriate to be more sensitive to students' feelings, which includes their

feelings of disempowerment vis-à-vis us, their professors. Especially in need of reeducation are the older campus fogeys—tenured white guys are mostly in the crosshairs—and a few others deemed not with the program, which I guess would include me, as someone who has to suppress eye-rolling fits at the obligatory platitudes.

Had you been there to witness my reaction to a recent memo sent to the faculty in my department by one of our undergrad majors, imploring us to "be conscious of the vocabulary and discourse used in your classroom" and to "challenge ideas of gender, rape culture, whiteness and heteronormativity" in the teaching of our classes, you'd understand what I mean. Why does the purgatory of the nice place have to entail so many empty slogans? I fumed silently. There I was, huffing and puffing like some bow-tied neocon: this isn't intellect, I snorted (to myself); it's virtue-mongering. And yet: did I send a prickly reply pointing out to my young correspondent that all these terms have tangled and contested histories and meanings, that good intentions are fine, but we're all still supposed to be thinking for ourselves? I did not, because I'm fairly sure that if I had, I'd have been creating "a hostile learning environment," and I'm fairly certain there are codes against that.

Sure, there have always been ideologues on campuses, but the old ideologues were at least expected to argue the validity of their ideas. The new brand are ideologues of feelings, and feelings can't be argued. Despite being a certified left-wing feminist, I just don't believe that experience or identity credentialize you intellectually. In fact, it's usually the opposite: overvaluing subjectivity has a way of stunting intellectual growth, especially when it comes to ideas that threaten your self-coherence, which

the best ideas often do. The latest demands for intellectual conformity may come in progressive packaging, but feminists and leftists should be flinging these pieties away like lumps of dung, not kowtowing to the virtue parade.

The irony about this insistence on student vulnerability is how successful it's been as a tactic for accruing administrative power. Encouraging students' sense of fragility is swelling the ranks of potentially jobless professors while bolstering the power of administrations over faculty. As more of us get charged with newly invented crimes, more administrators get hired to adjudicate them, administrators whose powers blossom the more malfeasance they can invent to ferret out. Which means that in a situation already prone to projection and fantasy—teaching—faculty are sitting ducks for accusations made by emotionally troubled students (and the onset age for such troubles is often late adolescence and early twenties), for whom we're likely to become parental proxies and love/hate legatees. But what do Title IX officers care about projection?

Sexuality is a complicated business. Emotional distress comes with the territory some percentage of the time. There's a remarkable episode in Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels, where Elena, the narrator, decides to lose her virginity to Donato Sarratore, the father of the boy she's in love with. She's sixteen or seventeen at the time, and on the one hand, Donato disgusts her—his flowery language ("sleazy lyricizing"), his advanced age. Yet she's weirdly sexually compelled by him. She likes how he makes her feel. She wants to feel like a different person: he's her transit to a new self. After they have sex she reflects that she has no regrets, then

coldly dumps him. Later she'll look back on the episode with more mixed feelings, but in the moment, it feels empowering.

One of the attractions of fiction is that fictional characters open themselves to contradictory desires better than we readers do. But I wonder whether any of my students, schooled in the simplistic catechisms of the moment, will end up capable of as much ferocious emotional complexity in their work as a novelist like Ferrante manages to achieve. As a teacher, I do what I can to get them to think about their responses to the world as questions, not givens; to forestall the easy moralizing. When I really want to cause my supposedly sexually with-it students a world of despair, I like to bring up Freud. "If we didn't desire to have sex with our parents or vice versa, why would we need a taboo?" I've been known to inquire innocently when a discussion turns to, say, family dynamics, or they tell me Freud is passé. Their faces fall; there are audible cries of alarm and disgust. "Doesn't everyone dream about having sex with their parents once in a while?" I once asked, trying to explain the Freudian concept of dreams as a playground for repressed wishes—I nearly got ejected from my own classroom. Without repression, what would stop us from going around having sex with anyone in sight, including our siblings and maybe the family dog? I go on. More cries of disgust from the class. (I'm not claiming that such discussions make me popular.) I'm just trying to introduce them to the idea that we're all constituted by taboos and repressions we're not entirely aware of: that's the human situation. Disgust is what repression looks like. The unruliness of sexual desire has always required a certain level of prohibition, not to mention dissembling. Say hello to the incest taboo, the founding gesture of social organization, say anthropologists. Where would we be without it? In bed with

our parents, that's where. Ugh. Perhaps such ideas are especially threatening for a generation whose closeness to their parents is already so intimate—I've sometimes wondered about the role of over-parenting in campus sexual politics. You hear a lot of accusations about helicopter parents as regards the supposedly coddled kids—the right especially loves this line of attack—but I mean something deeper. Namely: why *is* intergenerational sex such a great taboo at this moment, when not so long ago it was no big thing? (If you want evidence, look at all those professor-student marriages.) What's shifted?

Freud is also a handy figure when it comes to the connections between desire and prohibition. Freud's general surmise, as everyone knows, was that children desire their parents, same-sex parent as well as opposite. (Recall that Freud thought everyone starts out bisexual.) This desire undergoes social repression; neurosis results. Of course it's an article of faith at the moment that all such desires run strictly in the other direction: old people desire young ones, not the other way around.

Please understand that I'm not encouraging anyone to sleep with their parents (or their teachers). I don't care if my students buy the Freudian line (it's a heuristic, not a set of unassailable truths)—I only care that they're thinking in creative ways. Where Freud becomes useful, especially for my students, aspiring writers and directors (or for anyone interested in plumbing psychological depths), is as the patron saint of failed self-awareness, the great disrupter of self-certainty—especially if you take seriously the various dispatches from the Freudian annals about how little we actually know ourselves, particularly when it comes to attractions and repulsions. If I can get a student to look at herself as a mystery, a bundle of mixed motives and ambivalences, I know for

a fact the chances are better she'll produce some original work. Does this make my classroom an "unsafe space?" I hope so, obviously, though I'm going to (mostly) refrain from mocking students for demanding "safe spaces," which I consider low-hanging fruit.

The problem is this: the more that "safety" means lowering the bar for accusation-bringing, then the more of a magnet the process becomes, and *has* become, for anyone with an agenda, a grudge, a neurosis, and sometimes financial ambitions—payouts can be huge for a well-timed claim—and there's no adequate method for sorting legitimate from specious claims (as we'll see). It's not in administrators' interests *to* sort them: a campus's success in "combatting sexual assault" is measured in increased accusations, which are closely tracked. By the way, complaints can increasingly be made *anonymously*—which is to say that witch hunt conditions are now an institutionalized feature of campus life.

Speaking of witches: the ostensible grounds for the Title IX complaints against me were that I'd written a few paragraphs in "Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe" (maybe four) about one of these supposed witches. This was a disgraced philosophy professor on our campus named Peter Ludlow, who'd been accused twice of sexual misconduct. I suspected that the case against him arose largely from the new campus paranoia, and alluded to that possibility in the essay.

Ludlow and I had never met—everything I wrote was based on publicly available information—though our lives would become weirdly intertwined, due, largely, to the shortsightedness of zealotry.

One valuable lesson I've learned from my recent experiences, and one I'd wish to convey to all aspiring brimstoners and code wielders, is that zealotry can boomerang in unanticipated ways. Because my accusers overplayed their hand by trying to bend Title IX into an all-purpose bludgeon (enabled by campus officials, it must be said, though they have their own overseers of course: the feds), Ludlow and I did eventually meet, and the more I learned about his situation, the more I saw his case as a lens through which the excesses and hypocrisies of the current campus hysteria came into focus.

A year or so after I'd first written those four paragraphs in *The Chronicle*, I flew down to Mexico to interview him for this book. This was February 2016. He'd moved there because he could live cheaply—he'd pretty much lost everything by that point. He'd resigned his position, and his employment prospects were nonexistent. The publicity about the charges against him had been intense. Before the accusations, there'd been a big job offer from one of the best philosophy departments in the country (Rutgers), which he'd accepted; the offer was withdrawn after students there got word about student protests against him on our campus and staged protests of their own. Once at the top of his field, Ludlow was now such a professional pariah that two book contracts were cancelled and other philosophers wouldn't even publish articles in the same volume with him. He'd been effectively blacklisted.

No doubt there are people who'd say he had it coming—he "wasn't a eunuch," in his own words—though I tend to think that's like saying John Proctor in *The Crucible* had it coming. The reference is to Arthur Miller's play about the Salem witch trials. (Proctor was one of the accused witches, hanged by the community.) Seen as a parable of McCarthyism when it was first staged

in 1953, the play was recently revived on Broadway—apparently someone saw it as relevant again. The Cold War blacklist, too, is being plumbed for current resonances. A recent biopic about Hollywood Ten screenwriter Dalton Trumbo (forced out of work and imprisoned after falling afoul of the House Un-American Activities Committee's witch hunt investigation of communism in the movie industry) left me reflecting that sex is our era's Communist threat, and Title IX hearings our new HUAC hearings. Except this time around, they're under the direction of the Department of Education, not Congress.

One consequence of resigning was that Ludlow left the university without a confidentiality agreement: unlike other accused professors and students, he could talk about his case with anyone he wanted. At one point, there had been a settlement offer on the table; no doubt it would have contained the usual confidentiality clause. It was withdrawn after students got word and marched against any settlement, which is where the shortsightedness of zealotry comes in.

Ludlow's parting wave—he had nothing to lose by that point—was bestowing on me the files from his investigation: the Title IX reports and thousands of pages of background material. (Bureaucracies produce a lot of paper.) It's an unprecedented behind-the-scenes view of just how haphazard and, frankly, incompetent the Title IX process can be. Reading it was incredibly eye-opening—in fact, a lot of what I read was shocking, and I'm not exactly unjaded when it comes to institutional power.

The reason I'm relating Ludlow's story in the pages to come isn't because it happened on my campus, or because my campus is worse than others when it comes to sanctioning witch hunts. It's because a trove of documents landed in my lap, and the story

they tell should see the light of day exactly because this *isn't* just Ludlow's story. From what I've learned in the last year and a half, these sorts of arbitrary and often outlandish tribunals are being conducted at colleges and universities all over the country, with accused faculty and students being stripped of their rights and, in many instances, simply hung out to dry to give the appearance that higher ed is mobilized against sexual assault.

The reality is that a set of incomprehensible directives, issued by a branch of the federal government, are being wielded in wildly idiosyncratic ways, according to the whims and biases of individual Title IX officers operating with no public scrutiny or accountability. Some of them are also all too willing to tread on academic and creative freedom as they see fit. Not long ago I spoke to a creative writing teacher who'd been grilled by his campus's Title IX officer about why he'd taught poems with sexual content in a writing workshop. I also read the lengthy self-defense he prepared, which included a defense not just of his teaching methods, but of Walt Whitman, a previous era's sexual renegade and, according to many, America's greatest poet. (Whitman had come up in the investigation; it wasn't clear if the investigators knew of him.)

Not to sound like a doom-monger, but this is the face of something gone incredibly wrong in higher education.

Writing this book has forced me to realize something about myself, or maybe a couple of things. The first is how disillusioned I've become, in the last few years, about the state of intellectual honesty on American campuses. Campus life has gotten so ludicrous and censorious that it hardly seems worth caring. It's far

more impossible to have an intellectually honest discussion about sex on campus *on* an American campus than off these days, which is nothing short of bizarre if you're someone who was drawn to academia in the first place because talking about difficult stuff was supposedly what went on there.

The second thing I realized is that if I could get this disillusioned, I was probably more invested in the place than I'd thought.

Despite my laments about higher ed and its current afflictions, someone once referred to being a professor as the last good job in America, and with that I completely concur. I'm lucky to be employed by my university (despite our recent contretemps), which I understand is unwillingly caught up in these current realities. I like talking with students about ideas. I like teaching. And by the way, it wasn't *my* students who marched against me and filed complaints. It was other students, whom I'd never met. My own students I adore—chastely, of course, and from afar.

Still, as you've probably gathered, going through a Title IX investigation—though my case was nothing compared to what others have been through (I still have a job, at least for the moment)—has made me a little mad and possibly a little dangerous: transformed from a harmless ironist into an aspiring whistleblower. High-flown terms like *due process* now spout from my cynic's lips, as though principles really mattered and something should be done to save higher ed from its saviors. It's just these sorts of unintended consequences that a more *psychologically shrewd* band of zealots could have predicted. I mean, having been hauled up on complaints once, what do I have to lose? "Confidentiality"? "Conduct befitting a professor"? Kiss my ass.

In other words, thank you to my accusers: unwitting collaborators, accidental muses.