PhysicsToo: Harnessing Individual and Community Power to Prevent Sexual Harassment
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Sexual harassment is more prevalent in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine than in any other public sector, private sector, or government workplace except for the military. Women's physical health, mental health, and careers continue to suffer as four decades of combating sexual harassment in the academy have yielded little progress. The MeToo and MeTooSTEM movements are raising awareness of sexual harassment as a major contributor to the so-called leaky pipeline that drives women out of academic sciences. Highlighting the most egregious forms of sexual harassment, however, distracts our focus from the more subtle forms of harassment that make up 90% experienced by nearly two thirds of women in the academic sciences, engineering, and medicine. These behaviors, termed gender harassment, can collectively be described as bullying, e.g. patronizing, mocking, and stereotyping. Gender harassment is not about sexual attraction, but rather motivated by the desire to devalue women or punish those who violate gender norms. A framework that focuses on gender harassment as a natural consequence of an environment enriched in disrespectful and uncivil interactions provides a useful lens for identifying small, everyday things every one of us can do to reduce all forms of sexual harassment in our workplaces. Preventing sexual harassment by promoting a culture in which all individuals are valued and respected is a more inclusive approach than those focused on blame and punishment.