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**Executive Master in Public
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A **green flag for the Flag System?**

Fostering a cultural change to tackle transgressive behavior in the
Belgian Higher education

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Glossary (weblinks in green)

AMS	<i>Antwerp Management School</i>
ATP	<i>Administrative and Technical Personnel</i>
GBV	<i>Gender Based Violence</i>
HEI	<i>Higher Education Institutions</i>
IC	<i>Internal Complaints</i>
IGVM	<i>Instituut voor Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen</i>
IHEs	<i>Institutions of Higher Education</i>
SENSOA	<i>Flemish expertise centre for sexual health</i>
SH	<i>Sexual Harassment</i>
TB	<i>Transgressive Behavior</i>
VLIR	<i>Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad</i>
VLHORA	<i>Vlaamse Hogescholenraad</i>
VLUHR	<i>Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad</i>
VUB	<i>Vrije Universiteit Brussel</i>
WSH	<i>Workplace Sexual Harassment</i>

*Dedicated to all victims, survivors
and people who were impacted
by transgressive behavior
at Institutes of Higher Education.*

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to her, who Asked me
to him, who answered me

to the peoplE who worked with me,
supervised, guided and supported me,
those who Stood by me,
and those wHo had to get by without me

and to you, to us,
for i am me,
because I am with you,
so you became Part of me



Executive summary

This thesis begins in the wake of Belgium's social #MeToo movement, highlighting a surge in media backlash of transgressive behavior within the higher education. Following the resignation of a UHasselt professor in 2018 due to transgressive behavior, the issue intensified with the subsequent, publicized court case of the Belgian television producer 'De Pauw'. What followed from the start of 2022 were cases of TB in all Flemish universities hitting the media. This exposure revealed pervasive transgressive behavior, manifesting as bullying, harassment, discrimination, violence, and (sexual) misconduct. The absence of a clear, unified definition, e.g., in university regulations, ethical codes but also in the Flemish Codex of Higher Education obstructed comprehensive understanding of the topic, and hampered a timely, appropriate and proportional response to these incidents. This thesis aims to establish such comprehensive definition of transgressive behavior through a narrative literature review, exploring the various forms it takes. It examines the systemic vulnerabilities within higher education to this behavior, proposing evidence-based and practice-based measures for mitigation. A significant focus of this thesis is the development of an evidence-based training program based on the SENSOA Flag System, yet adapted to assess and discuss the panoply of transgressive behavior within Institutes of Higher Education. This training has been validated by comparing the results of a participants, that followed a training and subsequently took a survey to assess 15 scenarios of TB and a control group taking the same survey online. The current results indicate that trained participants assess transgressive behavior equally well than the untrained control group, indicating that in general staff members at IHEs are already able to assess such cases. However, the trained group is better able to judge their own capabilities and they report a significantly positive learning effect to assess transgressive behavior. While the Flag System is stretched beyond its initial intention, it proves a valuable framework for better understanding and addressing transgressive behavior in higher education. Before drawing final conclusions, more research in different departments, faculties and other IHEs is needed. Only then can their potential be validated, enabling a true cultural shift that leaves no room for transgressive behavior.

General introduction to the thesis

This introduction first sets the scene by explaining the problem of transgressive behavior in at the institutes of higher education (IHEs). Next, the VUB approach to tackle transgressive behavior is detailed, outlining the initial response, but also indicating the need for more research on the topic, which is the main body of this work. To this end, this chapter then states the research questions and closes with the perspective and structure of this thesis.

1.1 The #Metoo movement and transgressive behavior

In the past, transgressive behavior has been mostly associated to sexual transgressive behavior with rape and sexual assault being the most extreme cases and leading to criminal prosecution and eventual conviction. Transgressive behavior is a broader term however, and it comes in various forms, ranging from bullying, harassment, violence, sexual misconduct and deviance. Some forms are adopted by the Belgian law of June 11, 2002 on protection against violence, harassment and unwanted sexual behavior at work¹. (Ministerie van tewerkstelling en arbeid, 2002) The modern society has however significantly evolved and over the last two decades, the #MeToo movement has been calling out for more attention to prevent and tackle transgressive behavior. Several sectors were highlighted in particular: the sports sector (De Standaard, 2015), the political sector (De Standaard, 2017a), the media (De Standaard, 2017b), and, since 2022 in particular, also the Belgian higher education. This issue was first reported on in the Belgian press at the end of 2018, when UHasselt professor L.V. received his resignation due to inappropriate communication with (doctoral) students, both in-person and online. (De Standaard, 2019) His resignation followed a disciplinary procedure at the university, as the prior judicial procedure did not lead to a conviction. In November 2017 however, transgressive behavior really hit the media as the case *De Pauw*, a popular Belgian television producer and presenter, came to light. (De Standaard, 2017b) This case divided the public opinion in two, leading to years of sustained, increased attention to the topic. Shortly after his conviction in court at the end of 2021 (De Standaard, 2021), transgressive behavior in the higher education flooded the media, with the case *D.T.* at the VUB being the first of many. (De Standaard, 2022b) It soon became clear that such behavior was present at all Flemish universities as cases at KU Leuven, UGent and UA were

¹ Article 32ter paragraph
1° violence at work, 2°
harassment at work, 3°
sexual harassment at work.

reported on. (De Standaard, 2022a; De Standaard, 2023) At the time, there was no clear definition of transgressive behavior, and it was only in October 2023 that a decree was implemented the *Flemish Codex of the Higher Education*. (Vlaamse Overheid, n.d.) The lack of a unified definition for transgressive behavior, with only its various forms specifically outlined, impedes comprehensive studies and understanding of the issue, as focus tends to shift towards isolated incidents rather than the broader context. Also, prior research on transgressive behavior mainly focused on (what was then called) the aggressor and the victim. More recent research not only broadens this terminology, by, e.g., also including terms as the alleged perpetrator and survivor, but also widens the circle of people involved. For example, research on transgressive behavior in organisations has shown that organisational factors, tasks&roles, the team and the people in leadership positions in particular have an impact on the occurrence of transgressive behavior and can even sustain it. Also, stress, communication styles, company culture and norms&values can have an impact. From a policy perspective, these are important factors to take into consideration. (Arbeid, 2006)

1.2 The VUB approach

Encouraged by then Flemish Minister of Education Hilde Crevits, the presidents of VLIR, VLUHR and VLHORA signed a charter to tackle transgressive behavior (TB) on March 21, 2018. (VLIR, VLUHR, and VLHORA, 2018) From the viewpoint of prevention, the charter mentions the importance of instigating a framework to discuss TB. In response to TB, the charter mentions a low threshold to reporting, preferably at an independent entity (called *Meldpunt* in Dutch), clear communication, detailed procedures that foster equal treatment across different cases and focus on recovery, internal guidance of the people involved, coordination of internal help and even guidance towards external reporting, e.g. at UNIA (the interfederal center for equal opportunities), the *Genderkamer* or the *Instituut voor Gelijkheid van Mannen en Vrouwen*. Finally, the charter also encourages universities to find a balance between privacy and transparency when communicating to the press and to set up a system to monitor TB at the level of the organisation.

The media backlash that started at the beginning of 2022 clearly indicated that the recommendations outlined in the Charter were not yet sufficiently implemented. The then Flemish Minister of Education Ben Weyts has therefor issued an audit and the VLIR is taking the lead in this via several ad-hoc task forces. The *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* (VUB) was one of the first universities to evaluate its policy and procedures. In practice, Rector Pauwels and the VUB Board of Directors, led by Karsten De Clerck, reached out to me in my capacity as the *Academic Advisor on Well-being to the rector* to coordinate our university's response. This response is detailed in Figure 1.1.

Several task forces were established to ensure an adequate and immediate response before the beginning of the academic year 2022—2023. Three task forces (1–3) focused on rapid implementation changes that are part of a reactive approach to TB, while a fourth (4) focused on preventive measures. All task forces comprised experts, students, union representatives, and university representatives.

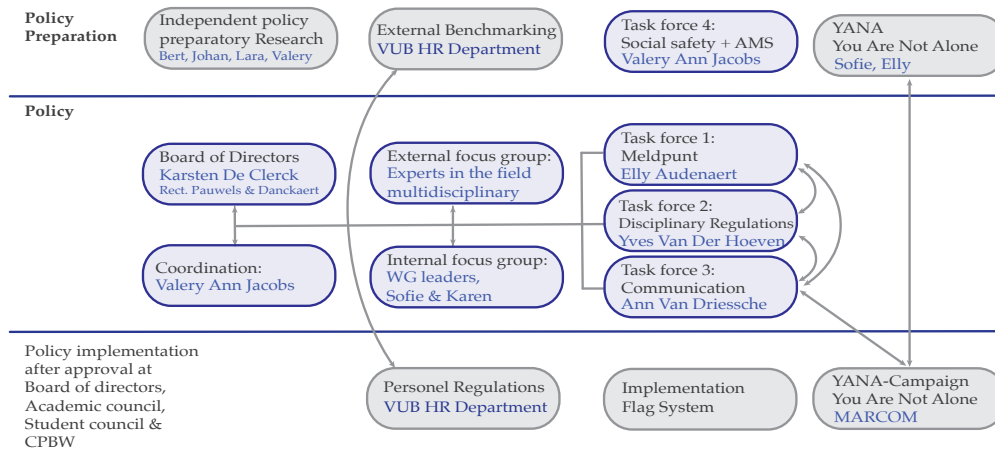


Figure 1.1: Structured overview of VUB's response to TB indicating three phases that, due to the crisis-situation, occurred in part simultaneously: policy preparation, policy drafting and operational implementation. The different task forces, focus groups and councils are shown and their reporting schemes are indicated by arrows. The items in blue were part of the operations during the period FEB 2022 to SEPT 2022, while the other items are part of a long-term response lasting until SEPT 2024.

The **first task force**, led by Elly Audenaert, head of Meldpunt, evaluated our reporting body, called *Meldpunt* in Dutch, its procedures and its communication protocol. The **second task force** revised the disciplinary regulations at VUB, as well for personnel as for students. They also focused on a communication protocol during and after a disciplinary procedure. The **third task force**, led by Ann Van Driessche, head of Marketing and Communication, prepared an internal and external communication strategy to be rolled out by the start of the academic year 2022-2023 in September. Together, these three task forces also established a *cascading communication protocol* with guidelines indicating who would receive access to specific information and what information these people or entities (departments, faculties, research groups, etc.) could or should share with others. An example is used to illustrate the importance of such *cascading communication protocol*: imagine the situation where a disciplinary procedure has been initiated involving a case of TB between students where, before any outcome of the disciplinary procedure, preventive measures have been taken: the alleged perpetrator needs to take their exam apart from the other students. The Dean of the Faculty is informed about these measures. Then the question arises whether the Dean can, or should, share this information with certain, or all, staff members and students, as (a) in case an exam is organized, the professors should know an alternative exam location should be organized for the alleged perpetrator, and (b) the students, possibly including victims, survivors and people who reported on this case of TB, will ask to know beforehand if measures are taken so that they will not be confronted with the alleged perpetrator during their exam. The mere thought of this possibility is stressful for them and influences their performance at the exam. A **fourth task force**, was tasked with research on preventive measures that could foster a culture of change concerning TB at our university. My enrollment in the MBA of Public Governance and Leadership at AMS, as well as the resulting thesis are a major part of the activities in that task force. Although this task force began its work alongside the first three, it was initially scheduled to continue at least until the end of the academic year 2023-2024.

Consistency among the task forces was maintained by an internal and external focus group. The **internal focus group** included the leaders of each task force, the then Rector's Advisor on Equality and Diversity, Prof. Karen Celis, the head of the Commission on Student Well-being at the Vice-Rectorate for Education and Student Affairs, Sofie De Smet, and Rector Pauwels until August 2022, subsequently succeeded by Rector Danckaert. The **external focus group** was composed of experts in the fields of law, trauma and well-being (TB), communication, and psychology, including Rector Pauwels and later Rector Danckaert; Françoise Tulkens, former vice-president of the European Court of Human Rights; Peter Adriaenssens, a child psychiatrist with expertise in children's rights, education, and trauma; Noël Slangen, a Belgian communication specialist focusing on crisis communication; Annelies D'Espaillier, a lawyer specializing in equal opportunities with an interest in education and mediation, then ombudswoman for the 'Genderkamer Vlaamse Overheid' and currently active within the 'Staatsraad'; Christine Mussche, a prominent Belgian lawyer commissioned by the 'Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen (IGVM)' to defend victims in the Bart De Pauw case; and Liesbet Stevens, co-director of the 'Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen (IGVM)'.

The end result of the first phase of the initial response was a large media campaign on campus called 'YANA' which stands for You Are Not Alone. At the same time the new procedure for the disciplinary committee and the renewed working of Meldpunt were implemented. Recognizing that this initial approach might not be sufficient for the future, a second phase was immediately proposed. This phase includes (a) an independent policy preparatory research on the underlying reasons why institutions of higher education (IHEs) are so vulnerable to trauma and well-being issues, scheduled to last for two academic years and concluding by June 2024; (b) an external benchmark study examining regulations both within and outside Flanders, focusing on other sectors as well as EU standards and organizations such as the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO); and (c) the YANA-trajectory, which brought together all individuals involved in VUB's support system to outline their responsibilities towards each other and those who seek their assistance. Finally, the results of this thesis are part of a possible implementation plan to organize a university wide training on assessing TB based on the SENSOA Flag System.

1.3 *The main research questions of this thesis*

As a university, we expect (a) *from each member of our community to exhibit appropriate and desirable behavior in line with the values of our institution.* (b) *When transgressive behavior does occur, our primary concern is the well-being of those involved. In our assistance, procedures, and communication surrounding such incidents, we strive to balance discretion with transparency.* (c) *If we conclude that transgressive behavior has indeed occurred at our university, we respond promptly, appropriately, and with proportional measures.* Now that the basic disciplinary regulations, its procedures and communication have been improved and a lower level of reporting has been installed, IHEs should focus their attention to preventive measures by researching why they are so vulnerable to transgressive behav-

Mission statement

ior, which forms occur, as well as their frequency and impact, and finally to develop preventive measures, such as training sessions, to increase the knowledge about TB. Only then can a true change of culture be deployed that leaves no margin for any transgressive behavior. In this context, the main research questions of this thesis are:

Research question 1 Which forms of transgressive behavior occur in the context of the higher education and how can their definitions lead to an overarching definition of transgressive behavior.

Research Questions

Research question 2 From an organisational and policy perspective, what are the underlying reasons why IHEs are so prone to TB, what policy is suggested in literature and which instruments can be deployed.

Research question 3 A green flag for the Flag system? What is the impact of developing a training tool, based on the SENSOA Flag system, to assess transgressive behavior at IHEs.

1.4 *The perspective and structure of this thesis*

This thesis is written by the academic coordinator on wellbeing of the VUB. This implies that it is written by a staff member of the university governance and from a **policy perspective** of an Institute of Higher Education (IHE). From such perspective it is important to have a working definition of 'transgressive behavior' (TB) that can be used in policy documents, the disciplinary procedure, the assistance (aid) system, e.g., reporting points, also known by the Dutch term 'Meldpunt' and internal & external communication about the matter. The lack of such definition had hampered the early activities that were undertaken following the first media-reports on TB in the media. Secondly, the university governance was repeatedly consulted on the reasons why IHEs were so vulnerable to TB, reasoning that such understanding is crucial to implement sustainable solutions. From that it follows that thirdly, and in response to the demand for the installation of more preventive measures to tackle TB, the university government wants to implement appropriate and effective policy instruments that are known to improve the situation.

Policy perspective

Consequently, this thesis is structured as follows. The next chapter starts from a narrative review on transgressive behavior in the higher education. The first goal is to obtain a working definition of the term TB that can be used to cover the panoply of various forms of TB that occur at IHEs. Secondly, this study also allows for the determination of the underlying reasons why IHEs are so prone to TB, what policy is suggested in literature and which instruments can be deployed. Following this study, the next chapter then describes a training based on the SENSOA framework to assess TB in the context IHEs. Finally, these results are reviewed critically, conclusion are drawn and an outlook towards future work is given in the last chapter of this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

2

Narrative review on TB at IHEs

2.1 Introduction

With the rise of the social #MeToo movement in Belgium, a wave of media backlash on transgressive behavior in the higher education emerged. Moreover, from a judicial point of view, various forms of transgressive behavior, e.g. stalking, became criminalized in court, thus leading to more attention to the topic. (De Standaard, 2021) Prior literature focused more on single forms of transgressive behavior, e.g., sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation, toxicity, incivility, unethical behavior, discrimination, abuse of power, workplace deviance, etc. without necessarily bringing them under the umbrella of transgressive behavior. The term ‘transgressive behavior’ is thus a rather novel and recent term which currently lacks an overarching definition and has not much been studied as a whole. Therefore, this chapter aims to propose a working definition. From an organisational perspective, also policy proposals and interventions are listed. This overview is based on a narrative review protocol of transgressive behavior at institutes of higher education carried out in the fourth quarter of 2023. The results first show it is possible to put forward a working definition of transgressive behavior and to structure different forms thematically. Secondly, this review also allows for the determination of the underlying reasons why IHEs are so prone to TB, what policy is suggested in literature and which instruments can be deployed.

2.2 Methodology

This work presents a narrative review on transgressive behavior in the higher education. The research questions underlying this work were:

Research question 1: Which forms of transgressive behavior occur in the context of the higher education and how can their definitions lead to an overarching definition of transgressive behavior.

Research question 2: From an organisational and policy perspective, what are the underlying reasons why IHEs are so prone to TB, what policy is suggested in literature and which instruments can be deployed.

As illustrated in the PRISM flow chart (Fig. 2.1), the identification phase of this research involved consulting three databases: PubMed, PsychInfo, and Web of Science. The search string employed was:

((Transboundary* OR Transgress* OR Transgressive behavior OR Bully* OR Cyberbully* OR Extort* OR Grooming OR Neglect* OR Harass* OR Stalk* OR Threat* OR Toxic OR Workload) AND (Academic* OR Higher educati* OR Universi*) AND (workplace) AND (policy))

The rationale for this search string is as follows: first, it includes various forms of transgressive behavior identified in a preliminary literature study. Second, to focus on the higher education sector, terms related to academia were integrated. Third, given the study's emphasis on transgressive behavior (TB) among personnel, the term 'workplace' was added. Finally, this thesis examines policy measures for addressing TB in Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs), thereby necessitating the inclusion of 'policy' in the search terms. Notably, a concurrent study co-led by the author of this work at VUB employs a broader search strategy by excluding the term 'policy'. This approach yielded over 1000 initial papers, approximately 10% of which were relevant enough for a full text reading.

Only peer-reviewed articles and review articles were searched for and the Publication date was limited to the last 15 years, thus covering the timespan from 2009 to 2023. This search led to a total of 96 matches: Web Of Science ($n = 53$), PsycInfo ($n = 14$) and PubMed ($n = 29$). In the screening phase, the software Zotero identified and removed 29 duplicates, leading to a total of ($n = 67$) papers to be checked based on the title and abstract. This step was performed independently by 2 senior researchers and afterwards any disagreements in the inclusion and exclusion process were resolved during a meeting between these reviewers. No conflicts, necessitating the advice of a third researcher, were found. In the eligibility phase, the selection criteria for inclusion and exclusion were adopted to the total of unique articles. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established as follows:

Populations Include articles on personnel, exclude articles covering only students.

Document Type Only article and review article are included, excluding reports, books, book chapters, dissertations,...

Languages Only English publications were included, excluding publications in other languages.

In total, $n = 43$ articles were excluded, either because they dealt with the wrong population ($n = 22$), e.g., students only ($n = 9$), hospital staff ($n = 12$) or only members of the unions ($n = 1$), because they were off-topic ($n = 18$), e.g., breast-feeding ($n = 1$), Covid ($n = 3$), grief ($n = 1$), inclusion ($n = 1$), sedentary behavior ($n = 1$), smoking ($n = 2$), general wellbeing at work ($n = 8$) or work-integrated learning ($n = 1$) or because it was the wrong document type ($n = 3$), e.g., a report ($n = 2$) or a book ($n = 1$). The step has also been performed by the same two senior reviewers who came to a unanimous agreement after a short meeting. Finally, the remaining remaining

24 publications underwent a full-text reading, excluding another ($n = 3$) publications because the text indicated the wrong population was studied, i.e., students only ($n = 2$) and hospital staff ($n = 1$). This led to the acceptance of ($n = 21$) final articles on which the further narrative review is based.

2.3 *Defining TB at IHEs from a policy perspective*

The term transgressive behavior (TB) lacks an overarching definition to the best of the author's current knowledge. Therefore, this section aims to propose a working definition. To begin, a distinction should be made between a person experiencing or observing transgressive behavior, and a post-hoc decision or ruling by a governing body that transgressive behavior took place and may require a proportional and timely reaction, e.g., a sanction. The former is about how a person has experienced, perceived or read the situation. As it expresses the experience of a person, the perception thereof should at all times be respected, and should not be questioned as this may lead to secondary victimisation. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023) Experiences are inherently subjective, as each person's boundaries differ, may vary over time or depend on the specific context. However, from an organizational, legislative, and policy perspective—the viewpoint of this thesis—it is crucial to adopt a working definition of transgressive behavior as utilized in policy documents and disciplinary procedures. This enables a response that is appropriate, timely, and proportional. Note, however, that even if a governing body decides not to pursue a report of transgressive behavior, or rules that no sanctions be imposed, this does not invalidate the experience or diminish the significance of the reported transgressive behavior.

2.3.1 *Various forms of TB at IHEs*

When studying different forms of transgressive behavior and their definitions, a multitude of terms and definitions arise. Some authors prefer to group them together in a structured, categorised way. One can group them for example (a) according to who is causing the transgressive behavior: whether this is a single person, a group of persons (a few persons, a research unit) or even institutionalised (a department, a faculty or at the level of the university governance). An example of this is the difference between bullying and mobbing, where the former is considered more individual behavior and the latter is understood to be a group attack. (Khoo, 2010; Duffy and Sperry, 2007). (b) According to the (perceived) underlying reason the behavior occurs, e.g. due to a person's gender, sex, e.g., mysogeny (Gardiner and Finn, 2023), race, physical appearance, belief, etc. (c) According to the type of action and behavior the perpetrator is involved in: harassment, coercion, violence, hypocrisy, deviance, toxicity, etc. Notably, no classification is perfect, overlap occurs and no list is exhaustive. Also, various forms of transgressive behavior can be experienced and occur simultaneously or consecutively. Therefore in this work it is chosen to cluster the terms together, but allowing for some overlap to occur by cross-referencing. Moreover, the original definitions of the papers in the narrative review are used. While this may lead the reader to question

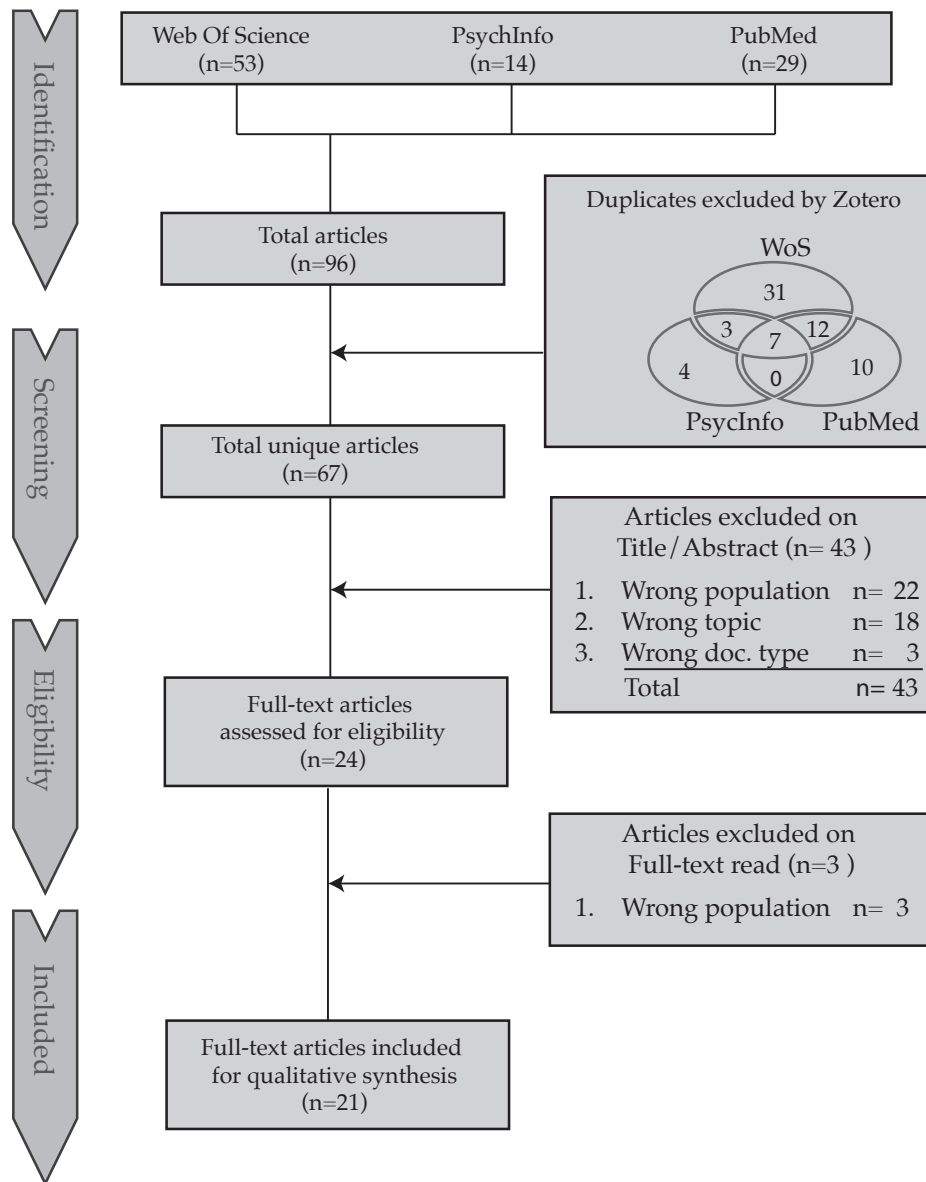


Figure 2.1: PRISM flowchart for the narrative review

why certain attributes are mentioned only for some forms of TB and not for others, it is preferred to stay as close as possible to the facts in displaying the descriptions of the forms, and to bring the different attributes together when proposing a working defining of TB at the end of this section. The different challenges mentioned above motivate the choice to develop a unique working definition of TB for the higher education in this thesis.

1. Bullying

(a) Workplace Bullying

Most definitions of workplace bullying include references to actions or activities that include specific negative behaviors aimed at an individual, which are persistent and escalating over time, are unreasonable and that are perceived by the target to be intentional and deliberate, and against which they cannot defend themselves, e.g., due to a perceived imbalance in power or influence. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019; Higgins, 2023) It can also encompass harassment, offensive, and/or social or workplace exclusion (Giorgi, 2012) Some authors state that it may stem from a single act. (Higgins, 2023) The term ‘bullying’ describes an attack by a single individual, whereas the term ‘mobbing’ involves multiple perpetrators. (Khoo, 2010)

(b) Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying encompasses the use of language or imagery to perpetrate acts of defamation (synonyms: smear, slander, assassination of character), threats, harassment, bullying, exclusion, discrimination, demeaning, humiliation, stalking, disclosure of personal information, or dissemination of offensive, vulgar, or derogatory content, possibly with the intent to harm or hurt others. This includes not only traditional forms of harassment but also extends to sexual and gender harassment online such as sexting, morphing, virtual rape, and revenge porn. It can be associated with a power imbalance, e.g., one that originates from the anonymity of the perpetrator, its superior technological knowledge, or the use of digital platforms to amplify harm through the ease of sharing, commenting, or liking offensive content. This broader interpretation acknowledges that even a single act can attain a repetitive nature online, aggravating the victim’s sense of helplessness and magnifying the impact of cyberbullying. Based on (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson, 2014).

(c) Academic Mobbing

A form of organizational pathology in which co-workers essentially ‘ganged up’ and engaged in an ongoing rituals of humiliation, exclusion, unjustified accusations, inappropriate or unethical communication practices, emotional abuse and general harassment in their malicious attempt to cause psychological intimidation or even force a targeted worker out of the workplace. (Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott, 1999; Khoo, 2010; D. Yildirim, A. Yildirim, and Timucin, 2007; Henning et al., 2017)

(d) Institutional Bullying

Institutional bullying is characterized by organizational policies and practices that systematically enforce harsh or harmful conditions on employees. It involves the routine mistreatment of individuals by creating an environment that includes ongoing, unreasonable demands on staff, a disregard for their welfare and well-being, and a culture that normalizes excessive competitiveness and extends work into personal time. This form of bullying is not caused by individual actions but is rooted in

the institutional practices and policies, often worsened by management strategies in universities, leading to significant stress and health problems for the staff. (Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021)

2. Harassment

(a) General Workplace Harassment

Workplace harassment has been defined in terms of the intention to harm another work employee through maladaptive interpersonal behavior. (Bowling and Beehr, 2006; Woodrow and Guest, 2014; Henning et al., 2017) It is an unwanted and unwarranted (synonyms: unjustified, unnecessary) behavior of individuals that causes undue stress and anxiety to their victims. (Saleem et al., 2021) According to Klinoff (2015), it is defined as ‘coercive or repeated, unsolicited, and unwelcome verbal comments, gestures, or physical contacts, including retaliation for confrontation or reporting harassment.’ (Klinoff, 2021) It is not limited to a single form. It could be words or actions that are implicit or explicit. (Peltizer, 2002) Workplace harassment can be, but is not limited to, physical, verbal, or written threatening, as well as visual or symbolic actions that support or perpetrate sexual harassment. (Klinoff, 2021; Peltizer, 2002). When the underlying reason for the harassment is a person’s race, it is called racial harassment (Henning et al., 2017); when the underlying reason is gender or sex, see gender and sex discrimination below.

(b) Gender(-bias) and Sex(-bias) Discrimination

Gender(-bias) and sex(-bias) discrimination in the workplace encompasses a variety of behaviors ranging from subtle to overt actions that disadvantage individuals based on their gender or sex. This includes abusive conduct, whether verbal, physical, or sexual harassment, as well as more covert forms like unfair treatment, biased attitudes, and a systemic lack of recognition and trust. These behaviors manifest with varying degrees of hostility and intentionality, often leading to a professional environment where individuals feel undervalued and mistrusted, with their contributions routinely being overlooked or diminished. (Lekchiri et al., 2019; Clancy et al., 2014)

(c) Retaliation

Retaliation is the negative action taken against individuals who report or confront harassment or discrimination. It encompasses any punitive or adverse reaction from an organization or individual within it, which aims to penalize, sideline, or disadvantage those who attempt to address or expose misconduct, such as harassment or bullying. Retaliation can include job-related consequences like demotion, termination, or denial of opportunities, as well as social and professional exclusion or continued harassment. This harmful response discourages victims and witnesses from coming forward due to fear of repercussions, worsening the culture of silence and perpetuating the cycle of harassment. (Täuber, 2022)

(d) Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a term that can be broken down into one of three categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. (Perry, 2023)

i. Gender Harassment

‘Gender Harassment’ or ‘gender negative behavior’ is not essentially sexual, such as sexist jokes or remarks, comments, gestures or sexually degrading imagery. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Fitzgerald, Swan, and Magley, 1997; Perry, 2023)

Rather, it aims at putting down and pushing out individuals who do not conform to the individualistic and competitive norms of the workplace, either by hostile attitudes or by diminishing, degrading, humiliating behaviors. Gender harassment is an expression of power and dominance, and as such well-suited to protect and enhance individual status in an existing gender hierarchy. (Berdahl, 2007)

ii. Unwanted Sexual Attention

Unwanted Sexual Attention can be described as behavior that includes unwelcome, non reciprocated sexual advances, touching, comments, or gestures. It is persistent, making the recipient uncomfortable, and contributes to a hostile or offensive work environment. Such behavior is unwanted, significantly impacting the victim's mental and emotional well-being. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Fitzgerald, Swan, and Magley, 1997; Perry, 2023; Henning et al., 2017; Richman et al., 1999)

iii. Sexual Coercion

Sexual coercion is described as the practice of exerting power over another individual to extract sexual favors, often under the threat of negative job-related consequences or the promise of benefits, which places the victim in a position where their ability to refuse is significantly compromised. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Fitzgerald, Swan, and Magley, 1997; Perry, 2023)

3. Violence

(a) Workplace Violence

Two types of workplace violence can be defined, based on the target of the deviant acts: organisational deviance and interpersonal deviance. While acts that are against the norms and expectations of the organisation as, e.g., sabotage, theft of organisational property, coming in to work late, bribery, threats and sharing company secrets with outsiders are some of the examples of organisational deviance, gossiping about co-workers or physically or verbally abusing co-workers or customers are examples of interpersonal deviance. (Adeoti, Shamsudin, and Mohammad, 2021; Henning et al., 2017; Richman et al., 1999; Bennett, Marasi, and Locklear, 2018)

(b) Sexual Violence (SV) and gender-based violence (GBV)

Sexual violence and gender-based violence (GBV) can be broadly defined as a sexual act or acts targeting a person's sexuality, gender identity or gender expression (gender-based violence). Sexual violence can be physical and/or psychological and includes acts that are committed, threatened or attempted against a person without their consent or in a situation in which a person cannot give consent. It is a continuum that includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure and sexual exploitation. In academic settings, sexual violence often involves coercion or threat of reprisals in situations of power imbalance. (Petit-Thorne, 2020)

(c) Sexual, gender or race-based harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. (see Harassment)

4. Deviance

(a) Hypocrisy in Management

The definition of the word ‘hypocrisy’ relies on two elements that generate this behavioral practice: lying (conveying inauthentic information) and deception (the mismatch between intent and action). Hypocritical managers may exhibit toxicity through silence, e.g., poor engagement, inaction, e.g., a laissez-faire leadership or unwillingness to support others, late action, e.g., adaptive, or exaggerated flexibility, poor action, e.g., imitating others, deception, e.g., covering-up wrongdoings, and double standards, e.g., insincerity, misleading others, or evaluating them on varying scales. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021; Pope, 2015) Compared to other forms of toxic leadership, hypocrisy is more secretive and thus rather characterized by concealing intentions and actions from others; the conduct of hypocrisy represents the softer, more indirect, and undisclosed form of toxic behavior. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021)

(b) Toxic Leadership & unethical behavior

Hypocritical behavior and toxic leadership behavior are related: managers practicing workplace hypocrisy exemplify toxic leadership. Toxic traits are manifested through hypocrisy, indicating that toxic leadership involves dishonesty, attacking others, disregard for institutional well-being, and a dishonest personality. These characteristics contribute to creating a toxic atmosphere, significantly harming organizational health and culture. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021) Toxic leadership includes a range of unethical behaviors that are aggressive, harsh, easily noticeable, and evidently negative. Some examples of toxic leadership include destructive, abusive, bullying, and tyrannical conduct. These forms of leadership are characterized by a significant adverse impact on organizational outcomes like employee turnover, low quality of work life, and poor organizational commitment. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021)

(c) Gender(-bias), sex(-bias) and racial Discrimination (see harassment)

(d) Retaliation (see harassment)

2.3.2 Definition of TB at IHEs:

Based on the above descriptions, a working definition of ‘transgressive behavior’ is now put forward. While any definition is in advance expected to be the subject about many debates, it is found important to try to give an encompassing definition that can, e.g., be used in official documents of the university. Given the wide coverage of the matter, such definition can only be expected to be vague, and should always be accompanied by the list of forms of transgressive behavior, duly noting that even such list is not exhaustive. The working definition of ‘transgressive behavior’ that is put forward in this thesis is as follows:

Transgressive behavior at institutes of higher education can be defined as any form of conduct that results in a range of negative outcomes for the recipient, including psychological and/or physical harm, compromised well-being, an unjust, hostile, or offensive academic environment. These actions, whether single, repeated or patterned actions, in-person or online, perpetrated by an individual, group or institute, may utilize power imbalances and employ aggressive, abusive, or deceitful means to intimidate, harm (including sexual harm), belittle, intimidate or exert control over one or more persons or the institution itself. Such behaviors may violate the integrity of a person, a group of persons, social norms, or

Working definition of
Transgressive Behavior

organizational standards. They can be based on factors such as gender, sex, physical appearance, ethnicity, race, religion, political viewpoints, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or socioeconomic background and moreover, these actions can be intentional or unintentional, as well as overt or covert, yet are always characterized by their adverse nature.

This definition evidently has its limitations. First, the fact that both repeated or patterned actions, as well as single acts are mentioned, risks categorizing each isolated incident as TB. For instance, a heated scientific discussion where a particular argument is raised, might involve someone to raise their voice or use strong language. While this could lead to TB, it does not necessarily need to be the case. Secondly, including both intentional and unintentional behavior opens the door to misinterpretation where accidentally harmful actions could be classified as transgressive. A straightforward criticism in a review process could be perceived as demeaning or belittling, thus being misinterpreted as TB. Thirdly, the inclusion of online behavior without specifying the impact it might have, could be formulated too broad. Another criticism could be the robustness (or lack thereof) of the definition. One point of view could be to test the definition to see if the various forms of TB are covered in this definition. Another way is to see whether the definition is not too broadly defined, leading to non-transgressive behavior to be erroneously classified as transgressive behavior. Attention should be given, e.g., to not classify normal competitiveness, that is currently inherently present in academia as TB, even if they lead to people experiencing stress or a sense of isolation. Also cultural misunderstandings pose a challenge in the multi-cultural context of the higher education. In some cultures direct eye contact can be considered as honest and assertive, while in others, it can be considered as offensive or aggressive. In such cases, there is a thin line between TB and non-TB according to the currently proposed definition. Again, this emphasizes the difference between a person experiencing or observing transgressive behavior and a post-hoc decision or ruling by a governing body that such behavior occurred and may warrant a proportional and timely reaction, such as a sanction. Finally, this definition could result in procedures being initiated against the university. It could also cause regular university policy actions, such as renewed allocation models, to be mistakenly classified as transgressive behavior (TB) according to the above definition. While the definition certainly has its merits and is formulated sufficiently broad to cover the aforementioned forms of TB, these weaknesses deserve the needed attention when the working definition is implemented in practice.

2.4 *Why are the IHEs so vulnerable to TB*

Based on the literature study, there are several reasons why institutes of higher education are so vulnerable to transgressive behavior. Some of these reasons are external, relate to the current society, while others relate to internal factors, as the university governance, leadership etc.

External context IHEs strive to be bastions of knowledge, promoting freedom of speech and defending academic freedom, yet they are situated within a broader societal

context with public management paradigms that foster environments conducive to transgressive behavior. Several management paradigms govern the public sector, such as the Classical Rational Management Paradigm, the Behavioral Incremental Management Paradigm, and the Stakeholder Management Paradigm. (Vallet, 2019) These paradigms evolve, overshadow each other, and periodically, some of their key elements re-emerge in new, yet often similar, forms. Over the last two decades, a significant shift towards the New Public Management Paradigm (NPM) has occurred at IHEs, emphasizing accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness. While this focus may initially seem desirable, literature suggests that NPM in IHEs is also marked by a lack of trust and respect for staff, creating highly stressful, unsupported, inequalitarian, overly competitive, and toxic environments. (Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021) Often implemented through metrics like quantitative KPIs for evaluations, budget allocations, and performance reviews at individual, institutional or supra-institutional levels, an emphasis on quantifiable metrics such as, e.g., publication counts, h-indexes, and yearly research turnover, has shifted the culture and values of IHEs, and lead to a higher workload and work pressure. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019) Moreover, the influence of neoliberal ideologies promotes not only stressful and competitive environments but also perpetuates inequalities by prioritizing efficiency over fairness and equal opportunity. This approach can widen the gap between different groups within an institution and worsen gender injustice. (Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021; Gardiner and Finn, 2023) Furthermore, funding changes have led to varied time allocations among academic staff tasks. While some universities expect staff to excel equally in teaching and research, while their actual work is focused more on the one than on the other, others have career paths more skewed by force towards one or the other. This growing corporatization has added to job dissatisfaction, perceptions of injustice, and fostered aggressive work environments, which in turn undermine collegiality. (Heffernan and Bosetti, 2021; Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021) The aforementioned inequalitarian principles can even be reinforced in some cultures; gender dynamics in academia also reflect broader societal norms, where stereotypes and conservative values significantly impact female academics' experiences and opportunities. Mousa (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022) and Lekchiri (Lekchiri et al., 2019) both discuss how societal expectations and cultural norms contribute to a setting where women may feel marginalized or unheard, further worsening the challenges faced in academia. In particular, traditional societies with strong collectivist values, such as many Arab countries according to the study, tend to uphold professors to high moral and ethical standards, which can paradoxically create barriers to addressing underlying issues of inequity and hypocrisy in academic settings. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021)

Policy, organization and organizational change Various factors typical to the policy and organization of IHEs contribute to fostering and reinforcing TB: size, structure, cultural norms, resistance to change, and inherent power dynamics. IHEs, as large and often public sector organizations, are notably susceptible to workplace bullying, a phenomenon worsened in male-dominated environments. (Hodgins and

McNamara, 2019) Similarly, ‘total’ organizations—like, e.g., IHEs and the military, where dominance and power imbalances are strongly emphasized—are more prone to TB. This is particularly true in competitive sectors such as academia. Within IHEs, power dynamics are further emphasized by clear differences in hierarchy, rank, and authority. Further on in the text, the role of power dynamics will be further worked out in detail. Moreover, the educational sector ranks among the most at-risk sectors for workplace bullying, with institutional contexts often being cited as contributing factors. (Henning et al., 2017) Although some universities have initiated measures to improve gender balance, significant time is still needed for more women to ascend to higher organizational positions. The underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions also contributes to the deprioritization of women-related issues and a culture that fosters power imbalances and leniency towards perpetrators. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022) Socio-cultural theory suggests that many power disparities stem from evolutionary bases linked to traditional societal norms concerning labor division and role expectations. These disparities often result in women being assigned heavier teaching loads, which impedes their engagement in research and publication—the criteria most universities use for evaluation and promotion, thereby perpetuating gender and power inequalities. (Henning et al., 2017) Additionally, the obligatory quotas for female participation in committees mean that fewer women must serve more frequently, further reducing their available time for research. Moreover, in hierarchical organizations, those in power often resist policies that could threaten their status or privileges, thus undermining efforts to counteract TB. (Khoo, 2010; Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Täuber, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021) IHEs also experience frequent changes due to shifts in management, budget adjustments, technological updates, or internal restructuring, all of which are linked to an increase in workplace bullying. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019) Such restructuring at the faculty level can also deteriorate job satisfaction, (Heffernan and Bosetti, 2021) creating an environment conducive to subtler forms of toxicity where hypocritical leaders exploit less powerful staff members. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021)

Institutional hypocrisy and transparency IHEs often present a facade of accountability and ethical conduct that contradicts their actual practices, highlighting a significant gap between declared intentions and real-world actions. This contradiction is not only a manifestation of institutional hypocrisy but also reflects a concerning lack of transparency. Often, unethical behaviors are handled internally without any external intervention, allowing these institutions to manage incidents in ways that may not necessarily align with the principles of justice and accountability they publicly advocate. (A. Yaghi and M. Yaghi, 2021) Moreover, the tension between advocacy for victims and institutional accountability reveals further contradictions. A defensive posture in legal matters often leads these institutions to prioritize their reputation over their moral obligations to protect the vulnerable members of their community. This approach can severely undermine the trust and safety of students and staff. Additionally, many institutions engage in what is commonly referred to as ‘window dressing’, the practice of publicly addressing issues of TB without implementing

substantial changes. This superficial approach is frequently used to enhance the institution's image rather than to effect real transformation. By appearing to take action against injustices while failing to enforce meaningful reforms, these institutions perpetuate environments where systemic issues remain unchallenged and unresolved. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023)

Systemic barriers to reporting and addressing TB at IHEs Interpersonal management strategies often prove ineffective in environments where bullying is tolerated, highlighting systemic barriers to addressing and reporting TB at IHEs. Support channels are not widely known, there is a lack of clear reporting procedures, formal mechanisms provide only weak protection. Even large organizations with dedicated human resources (HR) functions struggle to tackle these challenges. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019) Even more, formally reporting sexual harassment is the least common response among staff members who experience it (Perry, 2023) which is, e.g., demonstrated by the notable discrepancy between the self-reported experiences of GBV at IHEs and the numbers reported by universities, attributed to barriers to accessing appropriate support channels and fears of repercussion (Gardiner and Finn, 2023). Attempts to address these issues are not without risks, particularly for women who courageously speak out against gender injustices. Such actions can lead to isolation, lack of support, and eventual burnout (Gardiner and Finn, 2023). Also, people who report bullying or incivility in higher education settings often face denial of the issues and are sometimes told that such behaviors are necessary to further operations. Also, reports can lead to further attacks, gossip about their productivity and character, and even job loss (Higgins, 2023). In one paper it was mentioned that simply being vocal about GBV on campus led to feelings of isolation during meetings (Gardiner and Finn, 2023). Moreover, the highly specialized nature of academic disciplines, combined with the realities of securing positions, discourages both targets and bystanders from reporting incidents. Furthermore, reporting can retraumatize the victim, lead to further retribution, and negatively impact job performance, which often leads to dissatisfaction with the outcomes of reporting TB (Clancy et al., 2014; Täuber, 2022). Institutions, including academia, are too often permissive of retaliation against those who report harassment, causing more fear to report TB and thus maintaining hierarchical power systems. Harassment is generally intended to dominate and control the target, and reporting it undermines this control mechanism. Even worse, various organizational actors such as HR, members of the hierarchical line, and colleagues, use various discourses to persuade reporters not to voice their discontent. Ultimately, these authors find that many targets of harassment at universities are tricked into 'reluctant acquiescence' and self-silence. This can result in feelings of betrayal, complex trauma, and mental health damage (Clancy et al., 2014; Täuber, 2022). Prevention of these issues requires a proactive approach, yet management responses are typically reactive and problem-focused and are thus inadequate. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019)

Hierarchical structures and power dynamics Hierarchical structures, (perceived) power imbalances, and favoritism are widespread within academia, ranging from students to

lecturers, and from professors to department heads, deans and rectors. These elements create strong dependencies and control mechanisms. The presence of the variables such as status, position, role, authority, gender, ethnicity, and age further complicate these power dynamics, influencing the perceived power of individuals. Power, functioning as the currency of work organization in IHEs, is intimately associated with hierarchy. TB can become a strategy for maintaining or gaining power at others' expense. Academics with more seniority and expertise, may feel entitled to abuse others. This entitlement is consistent with observations that the academic culture, which permits and even promotes disagreement and critique, can be subverted by ambitious staff members aiming to undermine and silence their colleagues. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019; Bisailon et al., 2023; Heffernan and Bosetti, 2021; Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson, 2014; Hollis, 2022). Moreover, the academic organizational structures accommodate complicated relationships and power hierarchies. Mandatory participation in (off-campus) activities such as conferences, social events, and online interactions can promote TB. Academia even reports the second-highest rate of sexual harassment, only behind the military and higher than the private sector and government. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Täuber, 2022) Finally, the international context and thus the vulnerable positions it creates, even more so in some cultures, worsen these challenges. People, mostly women, in these contexts often face blame from families, societies, and colleagues when they expose or act against TB, driven by fears of scandal, fear, shame, helplessness and humiliation (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022).

Challenges of leadership Leaders and managers at universities bear a significant responsibility given the various leadership roles. Toxic leadership is frequently cited as a core reason why IHEs are particularly vulnerable to transgressive behavior. This situation worsens when trying to deal with TB as these behaviors are frequently seen as the direct result of poor leadership. Critics often highlight that the hiring processes for these positions tend to overly prioritize academic achievements over essential leadership qualities. Moreover, it's noted that management and administrative responsibilities can create tensions, especially as academics might struggle with adapting to business-oriented approaches that are typical in the current NPM trend. (Heffernan and Bosetti, 2021). Finally, in (Heffernan and Bosetti, 2021) it was stated that many deans acknowledge that incivility and broader bullying behaviors were not surprising within the context of university leadership, reflecting an almost expected norm that any leadership position may inevitably lead to some form of TB.

2.5 *Suggested and proven policy instruments*

Based on the literature review, it is clear that to effectively combat transgressive behavior (TB) within institutes of higher education (IHEs), a robust combination of policies and instruments must be developed and implemented. These measures are not only designed to prevent the occurrence of TB but also to address it decisively when it arises. Central to these efforts is the enhancement of leadership qualities and structural

changes within the organization, aiming to foster a culture of respect, trust, dialogue, and inclusion.

Extending beyond the university To effectively combat TB at IHEs, measures extending beyond their control are also necessary, involving policy, actions from government bodies, the unions, student organizations, media platforms, and the public opinion. First, governments play a crucial role by adopting proactive strategies to address TB, by enacting specific laws, by enforcing them and by sanctioning perpetrators. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Bisaillon et al., 2023)

Actions can also be the result of policies, regulations, and the active involvement of unions that specifically target these issues, enhancing awareness and contribute to a cultural shift towards zero tolerance for TB. (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Saleem et al., 2021)

Further, student organizations can contribute by demanding action and engaging with academic governance through various commissions, councils and their media. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023)

Moreover, broader media campaigns, using television, articles, advertisements, and social media, play a significant role in raising awareness and feeding the public opinion on TB. These efforts contribute to creating an informed public discourse that advocates for stringent measures against TB. (Saleem et al., 2021).

Furthermore, global considerations are also critical, as the diversification of the academic workforce due to globalization introduces challenges that require interventions beyond local boundaries. These challenges include the potential marginalization of minority groups and the complexities of managing a globally mobile workforce, often engaging with online learning platforms. (Henning et al., 2017) Finally, parents' involvement can play a role in building resilience among children, especially girls, empowering them to voice their concerns regarding such issues. (Saleem et al., 2021)

Acknowledging transgressive behavior Acknowledging TB as a significant concern is crucial for fostering a cultural change within IHEs. University administrations must recognize that both the institutional culture and the behavior they promote also contribute to the silence of victims. This silence is maintained through indirect or direct threats, including discriminatory behavior, retaliation, loss of opportunities, and inaction. Additionally, the prevailing country-specific culture and the influence of dominant groups can pose significant barriers to the full emancipation of female academics. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Bisaillon et al., 2023; Gardiner and Finn, 2023).

Studying transgressive behavior In the previous section, various reasons why TB occurs at IHEs were mentioned. However, more research is needed on the root causes of TB at IHEs, also because these can be culture specific. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023) Moreover, options for mediation and organizational diagnosis, at institutional or group-level should be facilitated. (Higgins, 2023)

Developing Policy and instruments at IHEs Addressing TB effectively in IHEs requires a combination of policy and interventions, emphasizing leadership and structural changes within the organization to prevent TB, with special attention to the rights of minorities (Perry, 2023; Henning et al., 2017). The presence of security services can also play a supportive role in this comprehensive strategy (Bisaillon et al., 2023).

Fostering a culture of trust, respect, dialogue, and inclusion within IHEs is crucial in combating TB. This requires cultivating psychologically safe(r) working environments where trust is encouraged and risk-taking is not discouraged, thus reducing fears about job security or reputation when reporting incidents. (Saleem et al., 2021; Täuber, 2022) As opposed to such environments, TB rather thrives in weak, toxic, and poorly defined organizational structures. In these environments, inconsistent messages about ethical conduct are common, and reporting lines are often unclear (Henning et al., 2017).

To enhance these cultures, IHEs should foster respectful engagement and meaningful collaborations that stimulate collegiality (Henning et al., 2017), allow for role models to come forward (Clancy et al., 2014), and implement flexible policies that support victims (Saleem et al., 2021). Policies against TB must not only be developed but also be adopted and enforced. As the leaders of an organization play such a crucial role, there should be policy on organizational power dynamics as this is one of the most important protagonists of TB. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Bisaillon et al., 2023; Higgins, 2023; Adeoti, Shamsudin, and Mohammad, 2021)

Additionally, these policies should take a broad approach that aligns with human rights to end TB and legitimize addressing it. (Hollis, 2022) Effective strategies include developing intervention tactics that consider the social, psychological, and cultural nuances of the IHE's environment. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Bisaillon et al., 2023) However, for these policies to be effective, there must be substantial buy-in from all stakeholders; otherwise, the policies risk repeating the institutional harms they aim to tackle and may alienate marginalized groups. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023)

Finally, robust enforcement is also essential. Weak enforcement encourages workplace deviance by creating a perception that such behaviors will not result in adverse consequences for the perpetrator (Adeoti, Shamsudin, and Mohammad, 2021). Therefore, people in a leadership position should have a clear mandate to discourage TB. (Henning et al., 2017) Additionally, IHEs might benefit from creating dedicated units to address specific forms of TB (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022), and establishing guidelines for respectful behavior not only on campus but also in field-based scientific work. (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Clancy et al., 2014)

Enhancing support and mediation To support victims of TB and mediate conflicts within IHEs, several key interventions can be implemented.

Firstly, organization-wide effective counseling interventions should be established, which include not only the target but also their family and the broader organization. This approach should be complemented by the availability of mediation as a viable

option to resolve conflicts. (Khoo, 2010; Bisaillon et al., 2023) Additionally, providing psychological and security services for victims, temporarily reducing their workload, and taking legal action against perpetrators are critical components of supporting victims. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022)

A reliable and enforced reporting system is essential for both bystanders and targets of TB. Such systems, however, must consider the potential for retraumatization, retribution, and negative impacts on job performance, which are significant factors that deter reporting and often lead to dissatisfaction with the outcomes. (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Higgins, 2023; Clancy et al., 2014; Saleem et al., 2021) To improve the reporting process, the creation of a diverse complaint committee is recommended to ensure that multiple perspectives are considered. (Saleem et al., 2021)

Moreover, the utilization of an impartial mediator can address potential biases that may arise from HR departments' dual roles with management. Establishing an independent entity to handle complaints can also safeguard the anonymity of victims and ensure the independence of the process, thereby encouraging more victims to come forward. This entity should also be responsible for follow-ups with victims and ensuring that appropriate consequences follow for the perpetrators. (Hodgins and McNamara, 2019; Bisaillon et al., 2023)

Holding perpetrators accountable The empowerment of victims and survivors is a key strategy in the recovery process. This can be promoted through access to both internal and external resources so that they can regain control over their professional and personal lives. This includes setting up the aforementioned support system for victims and survivors to facilitate their health and well-being during and after workplace bullying incidents. (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Higgins, 2023; Saleem et al., 2021)

Simultaneously, clear consequences and sanctions for aggressors are essential to prevent future incidents. According to General Deterrence Theory (GDT), effective institutional policies that prescribe assured and severe punishment for misconduct can significantly discourage such behavior. This is because the potential pain and consequences of such reprimands outweigh the perceived benefits of engaging in deviant acts. The severity of penalties has been shown to prevent employees from committing security violations and other forms of organizational deviance. (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Adeoti, Shamsudin, and Mohammad, 2021)

Training, education and formation Addressing TB in IHEs necessitates a comprehensive approach centered on education, training, and formation. One study noted the advantages of people engaging in practical labor to change the structures that perpetuate TB, suggesting that transformation through practical labor leads to greater understanding and highlights barriers to institutional change (Gardiner and Finn, 2023).

Educational initiatives are crucial in developing organizational awareness, assertive communication, and ethical leadership, which collectively foster a preventive culture against TB (Bisaillon et al., 2023; Higgins, 2023; Henning et al., 2017; Khoo,

2010). However, challenges remain as those who most need this education the most, are often the least likely to engage meaningfully with such training sessions or to acknowledge their roles in cultural shifts. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023)

Skill-based programs that enhance communication strategies and create staff support networks are instrumental in addressing incivility and improving responses to cyberbullying. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023; Henning et al., 2017; Bisailon et al., 2023) These efforts are supported by thorough training programs, e.g., where people engaged with local sexual assault centers to improve their competency in handling GBV issues. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023)

Furthermore, fostering environments that support humane critical thinking is essential. This can be achieved by incorporating knowledge about harassment into academic curricula and encouraging uncomfortable conversations about power and privilege, moving beyond mere workshops on unconscious bias. (Saleem et al., 2021; Hollis, 2022; Täuber, 2022)

Lastly, bystander training should not only teach recognition and intervention strategies but also emphasize social support, enabling individuals within IHEs to act effectively when they witness TB. (Lekchiri et al., 2019)

Creating awareness To effectively create awareness and counteract TB at IHEs, a multifaceted dissemination strategy is essential. This strategy involves the distribution of clear and efficient policies, regulations, codes of ethics, and procedures that guarantee anonymity and diligent follow-up for victims. Such dissemination ensures that all members of the university community are informed and protected. (Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Bisailon et al., 2023; Gardiner and Finn, 2023; Saleem et al., 2021)

Organizations must take responsibility for actively publicizing their TB-policies via various communication channels. This effort is crucial as it addresses the often-present issue of weak organizational culture which can undermine policy effectiveness (Saleem et al., 2021). Further raising awareness among higher education professionals about the prevalence and health consequences of TB is vital. This can be achieved through promotional campaigns, anti-harassment speeches, and even social media campaigns, which collectively work to highlight the seriousness of these issues and establish strategies for change. (Higgins, 2023; Mousa and Abdelgaffar, 2022; Clancy et al., 2014; Saleem et al., 2021)

Finally, promoting assertiveness over aggressiveness among leaders is another critical aspect of fostering a healthier and more respectful institutional culture. This approach not only enhances communication but also sets a behavioral standard that discourages TB. (Henning et al., 2017)

3

A Flag System to assess TB at IHEs

As the literature review in Chapter 2 revealed, many measures implemented at IHEs are practice-based, and few interventions have a solid evidence base for addressing transgressive behavior (TB). Although the SENSOA Flag System was primarily designed as an *educational tool* to evaluate sexual behavior among adolescents and young adults, this chapter explores whether it can be expanded to address various forms of transgressive behavior occurring at Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). This assessment will be presented based on 15 scenarios that commonly occur at IHEs, as identified in the literature study and in cases reported to us over the past few years. This type of *intervention* is chosen for three main reasons: **first**, the SENSOA Flag System is well-known in Flanders (Belgium) and has already proven its effectiveness in another context, specifically within the sports sector, where physical contact and strong emotional and psychological bonds are prevalent. (Vertommen et al., 2016) This indicates the system can be stretched somewhat to different contexts. **Second**, because the literature study indicated that education, knowledge and formation have had a measurable impact on certain specific forms of TB in the past. (Gardiner and Finn, 2023; Bisailon et al., 2023; Higgins, 2023; Henning et al., 2017; Khoo, 2010) **Third**, as a university, the VUB places a high value on continuing education and promotes itself as a (self-)learning organization. By implementing this training, it can put this principle into practice to align with those objectives. Following this intervention, a survey is conducted to determine whether participants' assessments of the 15 selected scenarios align more closely with the evaluations of four experts in the field of TB, compared to a control group that did not receive the training. Two training sessions were offered: one to the electromobility research group (MOBI) at VUB, which is predominantly an academic group, and another to the Infrastructure department (INFRA), primarily consisting of ATP personnel. The control group was made up of individuals who completed the same survey online after receiving personal emails and seeing the survey shared on social media platforms like LinkedIn.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, the SENSOA Flag System is explained in detail to familiarize the reader with the terminology and working principles. To apply it to the broader context of TB at IHEs, the criteria are interpreted broader, and their application to the 15 survey scenarios is presented, along with the rationale be-

hind the flag-colors of each scenario, where the colors green, yellow, red and black will correspond respectively to acceptable behavior, moderately transgressive behavior, seriously transgressive behavior and severely transgressive behavior. Second, the methodology of the training and data-gathering is outlined, providing specific details about the training participants and survey respondents. Next, the results are presented, focusing on the candidates' self-assessment and the training's impact. This chapter concludes with a discussion where some lessons learned about the scenarios and the training are shared. General conclusions will then be addressed in Chapter 4.

3.1 *The SENSOA Flag System, its criteria and use*

SENSOA is the Flemish expertise center for sexual health. It operates under a management agreement with the Flemish Government and reports to the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health, and Family, currently Minister Hilde Crevits (May 2024). Their strategic policy plan for 2022-2026 outlines key objectives, including comprehensive sexual health education, the prevention of inappropriate sexual behavior, heightened awareness around HIV and sexually transmitted infections, and the promotion of family planning. Additionally, they monitor sexual health trends to better understand and address emerging needs. To meet these goals, SENSOA collaborates with diverse stakeholders, set up campaigns, training programs, and educational materials that promote safer sexual practices. (SENSOA, 2024)

The SENSOA Flag System is the training program that will serve as the basis for this thesis. It is developed as an *educational tool* and is accompanied by a book. (Frans, 2021) It serves to assess scenarios of TB based on six criteria explained in detail below. Using this framework, the debate about TB is diversified and more factors are taken into account. It is accompanied by a training, offered by in-house experts that explain the framework, trains participants using example cases and then offers an in-depth analysis of these cases. Moreover, after the assessment of a case is made, a response guide is developed, which serves as a conversational tool that helps structure your communication with all participants. Such a training typically lasts at least 2h, preferably 3h.

The six criteria on which the SENSOA Flag System is based, are mutual consent, voluntary engagement, equality, level of development or functioning, context and impact, as is displayed in Fig. 3.1. Before outlining how these definitions are reinterpreted in the context of TB in IHEs, the original definition of each is listed: (1) Mutual consent: everyone agrees and feels comfortable about the behavior. Note that if someone is caught off guard, one cannot give consent. (2) Voluntary engagement: no one is pressured or coerced to step into this behavior, i.e., the behavior is wanted for the nature of the behavior itself and not, e.g., to get a reward of any kind, (3) Equality: there is no imbalance in power or worth, such as the hierarchical imbalance that naturally arises between teachers and students (4) Level of development or functioning: the behavior is appropriate to the individual's age or capacity, (5) Context: the behavior takes places in

The six criteria:

-
- (1) Mutual consent
 - (2) Voluntary engagement
 - (3) Equality
 - (4) Level of functioning
 - (5) Context
 - (6) Impact

socially appropriate circumstances, e.g., sexual conduct takes place in a private space. This also includes situational factors, as informal parties or alcohol use. (6) Impact: the behavior poses no harm to oneself or others.

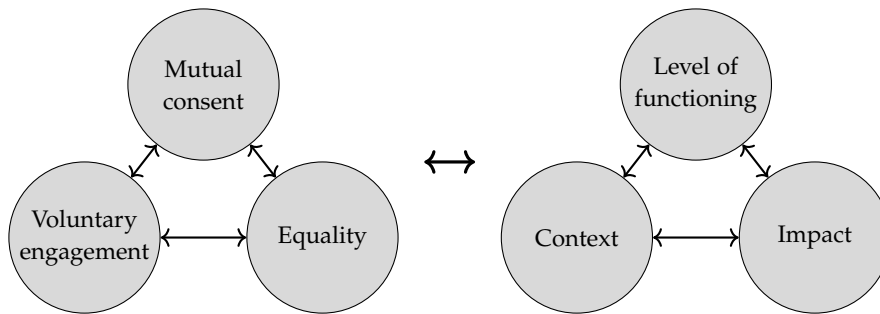


Figure 3.1: Presentation of the six criteria used in the SENSOA Flag system. While the ones on the left are more internal, the ones on the right are more external.

As can be seen in Fig. 3.1, the first three criteria are interrelated and may impact each other, e.g., when two persons are considered *unequal* due to a hierarchical relationship, the factors mutual consent and voluntary engagement can come into question. Take the example of a professor dating an adult student. Legally, there is no objection that two consenting adults having an intimate relationship of any kind. Also, as a university, one cannot intervene in the private life of a staff member, nor that of a student. If the university is however informed of the relationship, it can take measures to determine the consequences of the relationship within the university, e.g., by not allowing the student to be examined by that professor, similar to what happens when a relative of a professor takes a course. From a societal and organizational perspective however, the relationship could be considered a questionable relationship. The question arises whether the student can truly give consent and engages voluntarily in this relationship in case of such hierarchical relation. Imagine, a student idolizes their professor, falls in love with them, and starts a relationship. Then the voluntary engagement deserves attention before evaluating whether this criterion is okay or not. As the condition of voluntary engagement is no longer guaranteed, also the resulting consent of the student is questioned; indicating how strongly these three criteria are interrelated. As can be observed in Fig. 3.1, the first three criteria are grouped as they focus on the internal interaction between the people engaging in the behavior, while the other three focus more on external, more environmental criteria. Notably, all criteria can become related in specific cases, which is why the representation in Fig. 3.1 displays bidirectional arrows between them. An example of this is behavior that is performed voluntarily and with mutual consent in private settings, like a bedroom, but may no longer be desired in less private contexts, where fear of negative repercussions from potential exposure hinders voluntary engagement.

Based on the criteria defined by SENSOA, newly adopted descriptions are proposed in this thesis to make the criteria more broadly applicable for the higher education. To this end, cases of TB described in literature, as well as those encountered over the last years served as input, which will also be reflected in the selected scenarios later in this section and in Appendix 5. The same six criteria are used as in the original SEN-

SOA Flag System and the reader is referred to Table 1 of Appendix 5 for a structured overview of the reinterpretation of these criteria for TB at IHEs and which questions can aid their assessment in a case study. The descriptions and example questions to assess the criteria have been slightly altered to also cover more general forms of transgressive behavior in the higher education, while including the original meaning for them to remain equally suited to deal with sexually TB. As for (1) Mutual consent, the definition relaxes the condition that the behavior should be between two persons, as for example academic mobbing by is defined as a group behavior by definition. The definitions were not changed for (2) Voluntary engagement and (3) Equality, except for the fact that these apply to general behavior and are not restricted to sexual conduct. (4) The interpretation of level of functioning is also broadened to allow for coworkers that are in a different stage of their career to be treated differently. Consider a new postdoc joining a group and becoming the victim of harassment by a more established postdoc. Being new, the postdoc likely lacks the confidence to handle the situation effectively, as they are unfamiliar with how things are managed, how their supervising professor might respond to a report, or the organization's overall approach. (5) The criterion of context can best be explained by the example of a nighttime party at a team-building where alcohol is being used. In the heat of the moment, a director of a department touches a coworker more intimately than would occur on the work-floor. In this case it is the context that is a criterion to consider when assessing the behavior. Notably, if the coworker indicates this behavior is not wanted, the director should immediately follow up on this signal. (6) Finally, the definition of impact is also broadened: impact can, e.g., relate to the impact on the functioning of the IHE when abuse of power (deviance) is being exerted by staff members, or relate to the impact on the career of a staff member, for example when a new PhD student is discriminated by a person in power, this could lead to the PhD student leaving the position and giving up on obtaining a doctoral degree, thus gravely impacting their career.

For a given scenario of (possible) transgressive behavior, each criterion is assessed on a 4-point scale ranging from + okay, to +/- okay, - okay and -- okay. Rating a criterion as:

Assess the scenario by assigning either + okay, +/- okay, - okay and -- okay to each of the six criteria.

+ okay indicates that the criterion is met. If, e.g., this status is assigned to the criterion Mutual Consent, it indicates there is a clear consent that the behavior is wanted by the involved parties, e.g., when two coworkers enjoy giving a kiss when greeting each other in the morning and both have indicated they like this behavior. Later on it will be shown that a green flag can only be assigned in case an + okay is given to all six criteria.

+/- okay indicates that the situation is unclear and should be cleared out with respect to this criterion. When giving each other a kiss in the morning when greeting is considered part of the culture and one follows up on this tradition without asking if this is desired by, e.g., a new colleague, a +/- okay could be assigned. Once these colleagues have had a talk about this and the behavior is agreed on, it becomes an + okay. In case someone indicates not liking this and it happens, or repeatedly

happens, the situation aggravates towards -okay and --okay.

-okay and --okay indicates that it is clear that the criterion is not met and the level of unmet conditions can be established from -okay and --okay. Continuing on the prior example and to indicate more clearly the difference between -okay and --okay for the criterion voluntary engagement, consider the situation where one coworker indicates not liking to be kissed in the morning but is then verbally put under pressure 'to not be so prudish as this is how it is done here'. The criterion would be even more unmet in case the pressure is put repeatedly or would, e.g., become physical. To give an example involving another criterion than voluntary engagement, consider the situation where two coworkers regularly go out together and do not mind physical contact at a party, but one of the coworkers dislikes any contact at work. If then the one colleague touches the other at work, this behavior is assigned a -okay. In this particular example, also the consent would receive a similar assigned -okay. In both cases however, for a -okay and --okay assignment, other factors need to be considered and are taken account in the assignment of the resulting color of the flag describing the behavior in this situation. These are the following (a) repetition, (b) awareness of boundaries, (c) intensity, (d) support and (e) reach, and the assessment of these are taken into account when assigning a color to a flag. Repetition, as already illustrated in the above example, aggravates the situation. Also, if boundaries have been communicated, indicating one is made aware of these boundaries and they are then again crossed, this also aggravates the assessment. A similar assessment is made about intensity, touching someone once on the exposed part of an arm is less harmfully than touching someone on the exposed part of the breast area. Whether a victim of TB receives support has an important psychological impact on them: the scenario where someone is being discriminated against but immediately receives support from bystanders, is better than when bystanders do not act or even aggravate the situation by joining in with the aggressor, e.g., for fear of being bullied themselves. Finally, the reach of the situation also impacts the assessment: when for example a discriminating comment is made in a one-on-one conversation that is not recorded, this is less harmful than when a video of the conversation ends up on social media and is then distributed and shared beyond control of the victim, leading them to feel powerless as to grab the reach of the event.

In order to analyze the criteria and assign a color to the flag, 2 out of the 15 scenarios that are part of the survey will be presented here and analyzed according to the above framework. The colors green, yellow, red and black correspond respectively to acceptable behavior, moderately transgressive behavior, seriously transgressive behavior and severely transgressive behavior. First, the six criteria are assessed individually. At this point, no flag colors are assigned yet but if all criteria receive a + okay, a green flag follows automatically and the behavior may continue. Later we will see that if in a case there appears a +/- okay for one or more criteria (assuming all others are not -okay) a yellow flag automatically follows until the situation is clarified, e.g., by a talk between the participating parties or others. Based on that clarification, the flag color

Color coding the Flag System

Green Flag	acceptable behavior
Yellow Flag	moderately TB
Red Flag	seriously TB
Black Flag	severely TB

	+ okay	+/- okay	- okay	-- okay
Mutual consent		Should be assessed after a talk with the people involved.	In situations that are not okay, assess also the severity: · Repetition · Awareness of boundaries · Intensity · Support · Reach	
Voluntary engagement				
Equality				
Level of functioning				
Context				
Impact				

Table 3.1: Assessment Table

can change. A drawback of working with proposed scenarios is that a further assessment is limited. In case one -okay or --okay appears, further considerations are to be made, which could then lead to a yellow, red or black flag.

In summary: Table 3.1 shows that if all criteria are assessed as +okay, a green Flag results. In case no -okay or --okay flag is selected for any of the criteria, yet only +okay or +/-okay, a yellow flag results and the situation should be assessed further. In case for any of the criteria, a -okay or --okay is indicated, the situation needs to be assessed using the questions in the table, focusing on repetition, awareness of boundaries, intensity, support and reach. In case all of these are evaluated positively, such situation can still become (at best) a yellow flag, at which point the situation needs to be further assessed with the people involved. In case these are not evaluated positively, a further analysis of the severity will result in assigning a red or a black flag.

3.2 Two scenarios for illustration

To illustrate the method, two examples are given here, based on scenarios 5 and 7. However, the readers are kindly suggested to familiarize themselves with all 15 scenarios in 5 on page 79, especially considering an evaluation of a green, yellow, red and black example.

3.2.1 A yellow flag: scenario 5

At a team-building event, the evening is filled with laughter, food and drinks. The atmosphere is cosy and informal. As the evening progresses and people have more and more drinks, they start playing around. While doing some dishes, a postdoc is suddenly hit on the back (the "butt"ocks) by a professor in the team who wound up a moist towel and used it as a wip in a playful manner while teasing around. The postdoc wants to report the professor for transgressive behavior.

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+/- okay	The person is caught off guard and cannot give consent.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	There are no signs of pressure or coercion.
Equality	+ okay	The professor is in a hierarchical relationship with the postdoc, but there is no clear abuse of power of this position in this informal context.
Level of functioning	+/- okay	Due to the informal situation and enhanced by alcohol use (see context), the professor displays behavior that is not expected of a person at that level of functioning (professor) at work.
Context	+/- okay	The context and situation are that of an informal party where alcohol is used. More could be allowed during such a staff event, and the atmosphere can be lighter, but respect for the integrity of others should be maintained.
Impact	- okay	The postdoc wishes to report it. The professor may suffer negative consequences while the impact for the postdoc is limited to the occasion on the condition that the behavior is immediately stopped after signalling this.
Flag		As there is at least one criterion (impact) receiving a -okay status, a green flag is excluded and further considerations are made to assess whether it is a yellow, red or black flag. The behavior occurred once, without the professor being made aware of the boundaries. In a work context, this would be inappropriate but in an informal setting with alcohol present, boundaries inevitable become more vague. There were more people present that could provide support if needed. Also, the long-term impact of the professor is not negligible, putting the risk on negative impact with them. For these reasons, a yellow flag is assigned.

3.2.2 Scenario 7

After the new year begins, co-workers wish each other a happy new year in various ways. One person dislikes being kissed on the cheek and prefers a handshake, fist bump, nod, or verbal greeting without physical contact. Although this colleague has indicated this many times, they are still kissed on the cheek by the department secretary. How do you assess the behavior of the department secretary?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	- okay	The individual has previously not consented to this.
Voluntary engagement	- + okay	The individual cannot always easily avoid the situation, creating pressure to endure the kiss.
Equality	+ okay	There is no abuse of power.
Level of functioning	+/- okay	While it's generally acceptable to kiss a colleague on the cheek in certain situations, employees are expected to adapt their behavior when a colleague is reluctant.
Context	+ okay	This behavior is appropriate in this context.
Impact	+/- okay	The individual feels uncomfortable due to this behavior, which can also negatively impact relationships with colleagues.
Flag		As there is at least one -okay, a further assessment is needed. A red flag is assigned due to repeated behavior. If there had been no repetition, a yellow flag would apply better.

3.3 *Intervention approach*

Now that the Flag System is properly introduced, this section describes the approach used in this thesis to develop an intervention, i.e., a training on TB for IHEs and a resulting survey based on 15 selected scenarios to see if the participants' answers align more closely with the evaluations of four experts in the field of TB, compared to a control group that did not receive the training. The rationale for choosing this type of intervention was outlined at the start of this chapter. Two training sessions were offered. The first training was offered to the Electromobility Research Group (MOBI) at VUB, which is predominantly an academic group. Only later in the process it was decided to include the Infrastructure department (INFRA) as they are primarily consisting of ATP personnel.

The primary reason for collaborating with MOBI was their active efforts to break the taboo around transgressive behavior, a topic they frequently discuss in group meetings. The head of the department, the (former by now) department coordinator as well as various members of the senior academic staff, have already followed a training by SEN-SOA on 'leading while respecting boundaries', in dutch called 'grenswijs leidinggeven' and some have participated in a bystander training. At the beginning of the academic year 23–24, it was decided by the department management that the members of our department/research group (± 134 FTEs) would be approached to participate in this study, which would run from September 2023 to May 2024 for the results to be in-

cluded in this thesis. The following approach was chosen and is elaborated on in more detail below:

Gathering input First, a workshop was organized where various forms of transgressive behavior could be indicated and ranked. During a teambuilding event on the 27th of September 2023, the full staff at MOBI was questioned about different forms of transgressive behavior which they have experienced or which they have heard or read about. They were given colored post-its, where the color indicated the gravity of the transgression as they assessed it. There were four categories corresponding to the designation of the colored flags of the SENSOA Flag System: acceptable behavior, moderate transgressive behavior, seriously transgressive behavior and severely transgressive behavior.

The training and survey Together with the examples of the forms of transgressive behavior from the narrative review in Chapter 2, the input from the workshop served as the basis of the scenarios that are part of the training, survey and intervention. The training was based on the SENSOA training on sexual (mis)conduct, but it was extended towards general TB. The training starts by explaining the problem of TB at IHEs, then focuses on why the author of this work is giving the training, i.e. in the context of a masterthesis at AMS yet also from her function of academic advisor of the rector on wellbeing. Next, the comprehensive definition of TB, as outlined in Chapter 2 is presented and the participants were allowed to test the definition and to propose changes. Then, 5 preliminary cases were presented to them, which they intuitively ranked on an individual basis from okay behavior to seriously TB. These cases were:

Case 1 A professor has an argument with a student in a full auditorium. Suddenly the student jumps up from his seat, outbursts a homophobic statement towards the professor, while doing an imitation of the professor's behavior by imitating his gestures. The professor reprimands the student, who seemed surprised themselves, apologized briefly and sat down again.

Case 2 A PhD student reports some statements were being made by a professor about certain beliefs during the last group meeting. The PhD student did not yet dare to speak up but starts is afraid to go to the next meeting.

Case 3 Several doctoral students indicate that they succumb to pressure from their supervisor. Leave is denied, and when they are on sick leave, they are expected to take questions and assignments as well. When they fail to do so, they find that their names have been removed from papers to which they have contributed greatly before their illness.

Case 4 A postdoc who recently joined the team, opens up about the stalking behavior of another senior postdoc. The colleague seeks contact through all possible channels: via SMS, social media, Teams, ... Despite the postdoc's repeated indication that this behavior is not desirable, the colleague continues to insist.

Case 5 Several first-year students report that an assistant contacts them via social media asking them to go out together. When the students refuse, there is an

angry and threatening response, by which the students are afraid that this will negatively affect their results.

Following this exercise, the reinterpreted Flag System was introduced in detail and applied to the five preliminary cases. The participants received more information about the VUB support system and were then asked to take an online survey covering 15 scenarios of TB at IHEs. The questions in the survey were randomized. These scenarios and their assessment were developed in collaboration with three experts in the field: one person working at SENSOA, a senior postdoctoral researcher with a specialisation in sexual (mis)conduct and a professor in sports with a focus on ethics, who was involved in setting up the Flag System for the sports sector.

Three guiding principles for the scenarios were put forward. **First**, to also include sufficient green examples, as acceptable behavior should also be assessed correctly to not give the impression that every behavior is transgressive by nature. Okay behavior should be encouraged to continue. There were 5 green scenarios, 3 yellow, 5 red and 2 black, resulting in 7 (5+2) more extreme answers and 8 (3+5) more central answers. **Second**, various forms of TB should be included, focusing also on those forms for which the original SENSOA Flag System was not developed. As noted before in Chapter 2, forms of TB can overlap and coincide, so various forms of TB can occur even in one scenario. The occurrence of deviance for example, or at least the suggestion thereof, was present in 7 of the 15 scenarios, bullying in two, and harassment (including sexual harassment) was considered in 6 cases, while there was also a scenario on workplace violence. Admittedly, the scenarios focused less on physical violence and sexual violence as it was considered that these cases would be very clear given the fact that they are also punishable by law. Instead, these scenarios focused rather on cases where people would begin to question their answers because they are more complex, and subtle at the same time, and where a multitude of considerations need to be taken into account. Similarly, cases of incivility are by nature a bit below the radar and are as such very difficult to describe in a short scenario without using the actual definition. This prevented the inclusion of this form of TB in the survey. **Third**, the scenarios would be worked out in a gender-neutral language to be inclusive. Not only is this in line with VUB's policy recommendations, yet it also lowers the impact of potential gender biases towards TB.

The resulting scenarios are presented below, and their assessment can be found in Appendix 5.

- S1 A PhD student or postdoctoral researcher is being yelled at by person that is higher on the academic ladder, e.g. a professor, who is pushing them to work harder to publish sooner and more articles. This undermines their self-confidence, leads to stress and poor work-life balance. How do you assess the behavior of the professor?
- S2 Two professors from different faculties work together on some projects and have lunch or dinner every now and then, in particular after a meeting, but occasionally also just for fun. They promise each other to not only talk about work, but evidently, sometimes the project comes up. A PhD student of one of the professors is about to defend their PhD thesis and the promotor asks the other professor to be the president of the Jury. The president of the jury should be neutral. How do you assess this behavior as seen from the viewpoint of the PhD student?
- S3 A co-worker is invited to an online meeting, but only then discovers all other colleagues have agreed to doing the meeting in person. The online-coworker is excluded from most of the lively debate and has difficulty getting an opinion across. Also, the coworker is not able to attend the coffee-break after the meeting, where the discussions continue and most decisions are made. How do you assess the behavior of the colleagues?
- S4 A person of color that is part of the LGBTQ+ community is being discriminated by their supervisor. Stupid jokes are regularly made, never directly, but when they are around and can hear it. The other co-workers do not stand up for them, instead they laugh with the jokes out of fear of becoming the next victim. How do you assess the behavior of the supervisor?
- S5 At a team-building event, the evening is filled with laughter, food and (also alcoholic) drinks. The atmosphere is cosy and informal. As the evening progresses and people have more and more drinks, they start playing around. They all engage in this. During a playful discussion while doing the dishes, a co-worker is suddenly hit on the back (the "butt"ocks) by the director, who wound up a moist towel and used it as a wip. How do you assess the behavior of the director?
- S6 A PhD student and a postdoc in the same department have started a consensual (with mutual agreement) private and intimate relationship. They haven't told anyone as they are afraid of the impact it could have on the group. However, their relationship has stranded because the postdoc cheated on the PhD student with a new PhD student in the team. The first PhD student now threatens to inform the head of the department about the relationship they were in and about the fact that the postdoc is now having another secret relationship with the new PhD student in the department, unless the relationship with the other PhD student is immediately ended. The postdoc feels blackmailed. How do you assess the behavior of the first PhD student towards the postdoc?

- S7 After the new year has begun, many festivities take place where co-workers wish each other a happy new year in various ways. One person does not like being kissed on the cheek, and would prefer to just shake hands, give a fist or even greet the other with a nod or using words without any physical contact. Although this colleague has indicated this already quite a few times, they are still kissed on the cheek by the secretary of their department. How do you assess this behavior of the secretary of the department?
- S8 Two professors from the same faculty are befriended. They regularly have lunch and dinner, meet with their families outside of work and even go on holidays together. Both at work and in private, they continuously discuss their work and their PhD students, also the ones they do not have in common. They discuss the PhD's strengths but also the difficulties they have, as well as the conflict situations they have had with them and how they felt about that. A PhD student of one of the professors is about to defend their PhD thesis and the promotor asks the other professor to be the president of the Jury. The president of the jury should be neutral. How do you assess this behavior as seen from the viewpoint of the PhD student?
- S9 One co-worker is part of a commission that approves the budgets of the university, while another co-worker is part of a commission that approves internal research budgets. They have an informal meeting after work, have a beer and come to a mutual understanding that one co-worker will approve a budget in favour of the other, while the other will rule in favour of the former. However, nobody can prove they had this conversation. How do you assess the behavior of the two professors from the viewpoint of the university and the people working there?
- S10 A 60-year old professor, born and raised in Belgium, from campus A at faculty B starts an intimate and consensual (with agreement) relationship with a 23-year old international masterstudent on campus C at faculty D. The masterstudent is here with a visa for 2 years and obtained a full scholarship for the program. The student tells their friends they are engaging voluntary in this relationship and after a talk between the professor and their colleagues, they are now also convinced they are both aware of their choices, although some of them indicate they would never want this situation for themselves. The professor is not involved in any way in the study program of the student and in fact, they never meet on campus, as they work/study on different campuses, and are part of different faculties. How do you assess the behavior of the professor?
- S11 A coworker from research group A has recently published a peer-reviewed journal publication that contradicts the findings of another research group B. The coworker from research group A continuously receives a load of insulting mails, comments on MS Teams, via messages and social media from the coworkers from Department B, even outside work. Some of them already came to his office to threaten him (without any witnesses) that they would come and find him at some point, when they were working alone in the lab in the evening, which terrifies the

coworker who now reluctantly stays outside of the regular working hours. How do you assess the behavior of the co-workers at department B?

S12 A postdoctoral researcher uses the results of a PhD student in an article without giving credit to the PhD student. Moreover, the setup that was used to do the measurements on, is broken down by the postdoctoral researcher, who claims this was needed to build another setup. However, the PhD student does not believe this, as no new setup had been built so far. The PhD student fears that it was done purposely. The postdoctoral researcher is spreading rumours now that the PhD student is greedy and does not appreciate the guidance received by the postdoctoral researcher. How do you assess the behavior of the postdoc?

S13 Two professors that are head of Department are at the Faculty Council where the Dean outlines their plan to move around some departments to different buildings due to changes of the number of people working in those departments; some groups became larger, others became smaller. One head of Department states very directly (without any sugar coating) that 'they do not agree with this and they will not comply as they foresee more people joining their department soon'. The Dean dismisses this remark, bluntly states their decision has been made and closes the discussion. How do you assess the behavior of the Dean?

S14 A professor who just obtained a Tenure Track position and a senior postdoc are also befriended outside work. In fact, they had already been friends and colleagues before the professor obtained their tenure. They meet for a barbecue with their respective families. Like usual, they "try" not to discuss their work too much, but we all know how it goes: every now and then, the subject comes up, from both sides. At some point, the professor remembers the postdoc still needs to email the last version of their paper. As they remember, they popped out the question to quickly send it via the mail-application on the smartphone of the postdoc. How do you assess the behavior of the professor?

S15 Two students become a couple during their 3rd bachelor-year. They are in the same study program. One of them passes all courses, while the other struggles and takes a year longer to finish the master. At some point, the former becomes an assistant and suddenly ends up being in a relation with "their student", as they need to teach a course in the last year of the master to their partner. The assistant mentions this to the professors of the courses they are teaching and it is agreed on that they cannot correct the exam of that particular student. Meanwhile, the assistant remains in an intimate relationship with this student. Assess the behavior of the assistant. How do you assess the behavior of the assistant?

Two training sessions were organized so far, each time on a voluntary base. The first on 12/04/2024 at MOBI and the second on 03/05/24 at INFRA. At the same time, an online survey was distributed via email and via social media as, e.g., LinkedIn, where it was shared and picked up by many university staff members, IHEs and their rectors. At the time of writing, it reached over 5500 impressions, with unique views mainly in Brussels (30.5%), Antwerp (9.1%), Leuven (5.4%), Ghent (4.6%) and

Hasselt (3,7%) according to LinkedIn's statistics. To distinguish between members of the department who had the opportunity to follow the training, i.e., MOBI and INFRA, and the people outside of those departments, working in other departments or universities, three surveys were created in Qualitrics, having identical questions and scenarios, yet each having its own unique link. This allows for each of the two test departments to be studied separately, together and/or apart from the full list of respondents that includes the online participants. Notably, as the public survey was distributed via emails and social media, the possibility that people from the two test departments also used the public link cannot be excluded, as no identification is asked while starting the online survey. However, the correct link was shared to the members of these departments at least three times, twice at the start of the training, via email and MS Teams, and a reminder by email after one week.

3.4 Results

As of now, the term *participants* is reserved to those people that are part of the training group, i.e., those who took part in the intervention. The term *respondents* is used for all people who took the survey, irrespective of whether they are part of the training group or control group. The respondents that are not part of the training group, are part of the *control group*. When studying the individual departments MOBI and INFRA, or their collective results, the control group can be limited to the people from those departments who did not follow the training and this will then clearly be indicated in the results by stating *the control group at MOBI* or *the control group at INFRA*.

3.4.1 The respondents and participants

In total, 242 persons started the survey, of which **170 respondents** filled out the complete survey. The large discrepancy can be explained by three factors: first, the number 242 refers to the amount of times the link to the survey was clicked, but people then did not necessarily start the survey, as no data was collected at all, not even to the first question, asking if people were consenting to the survey. Second, 10 people did not consent to participate to the survey. Third, 8 people indicated to not be working at an IHE and were immediately redirected to the end of the survey. This resulted in 186 people taking the survey, of which another 16 people did not provide an answer to all 15 scenarios. To prevent them from impacting the results, these were excluded for now. This is motivated as follows: judging from the resulting errors, some questions were found to be a lot more difficult than others. How difficult a question is, can be assessed by the difference between the answer provided by the experts and the given answer by a respondent, taking a linear error into account based on the distance between the experts assessment (1, 2, 3 or 4 for respectively acceptable behavior, moderately TB, seriously TB and severely TB). The absolute value of the difference is used motivated by the fact that, e.g., erroneously assigning a yellow flag to a green flag, is equally wrong than the inverse and assigning a green flag to a black scenario, is worse than

assigning it a yellow or red flag, hence rendering an error of respectively 3 (green), 2 (yellow) and 1 (black). Comparing the total of the errors across per question for all respondents that filled out all scenarios, revealed that there was a factor of 7 between the question that had the most errors (scenario 9: 204 error units) with respect to the question that had the least errors (scenario 15: 29 error units). Although there exist ways to deal with this kind of missing data, it was chosen to continue working only with the 170 people that answered all scenarios.

Table 3.2: Number of respondents

Category	Nr.	%
INFRA	26	15.3
MOBI	50	29.4
Online	94	55.3
Total	170	100.0

Of the 170 respondents, a majority were academic staff, followed by the Administrative and Technical staff, further denoted by ATP, as displayed in Table 3.3. The ratio between both is 0,62, while comparing this, e.g., to a ratio of 0,53 for all staff at VUB. The external staff members (e.g., security) and job students only represented a minority of the respondents.

Table 3.3: Distribution of Staff Categories

Category	Nr.	%
Academic Staff	101	59.4
Administrative and Technical Staff (ATP)	64	37.6
External Staff	1	0.6
Jobstudent	2	1.2
Academic Staff & Jobstudent	2	1.2
Total	170	100.0

In each group, the number of participants who did or did not complete the training is detailed in Table 3.4. In the INFRA group, fewer respondents participated in the training, while the opposite was true for the MOBI group. Online respondents did not have access to the training. The right column shows the total numbers, indicating that the training group (43) makes up approximately one third of the control group (127).

	Group			Total
	INFRA	MOBI	Online	
Training group:	11	32	0	43
Control group:	15	18	94	127
Total	26	50	94	170

Table 3.4: Per group, the number of respondents who followed the training or not.

3.4.2 Comparing the training group to the control group

Now that the participants and control group are described, the two groups can be compared with respect to their answers to the 15 scenarios. At the same time, a group of experts, as described in the item termed ‘The training and survey’ of Section 3.3 on page 50. The assumption is that the answers of the experts are the correct ones. The results of all respondents can be found in the histogram on page 59. Each histogram corresponds to a particular scenario, indicated by S1 to S15 above each histogram. The color of the bars indicate the color of the corresponding flag that was assigned to the scenario by the respondents. On the x-labels of the axis, the preferred answers of the experts are indicated by circling the corresponding number. Visually, one can already assess that for some scenario’s, the answers were more in agreement, e.g., scenarios 11 and 15, while for others, e.g., scenario 9, there was a larger disagreement. Notably, the preferred answers of the experts don’t always match the most frequently chosen responses of the respondents.

Next, to assess differences between the the participants and the control group, the data will be further analysed. **First**, the answers of all respondents are gathered in a 18 by 170 matrix, where the first 15 columns indicate the answers to each of the scenarios for all 170 respondents. Column 16 indicates whether they belong to MOBI, INFRA or the online group, column 17 whether they followed the training or not, and finally in column 18 their Staff category is indicated. All data-handling was processed in SPSS and Matlab, the former to get the first results and the latter to (a) confirm these, (b) facilitate easy extraction of vector graphics and (c) to allow for scripting to automate processes. Given the fact that the expert group could only convene on the 6th of May, this scripting turned out to be very resourceful to swiftly extract information from previously validated scripts.

Second, two matrices of the same dimensions are created. A **first matrix** calculates the difference between the respondents’ answers and the expert answers, e.g., if a respondent answered a yellow flag, corresponding to the number 2, and the experts chose a green flag, corresponding to the number 1, the difference would be $2 - 1 = +1$. Thus, a positive difference indicates the respondent assesses the scenario too seriously. The inverse is also true, so a negative difference indicates the respondent assesses the

Y-axes: Numer of respondents per flag color, for scenario 1 to 15

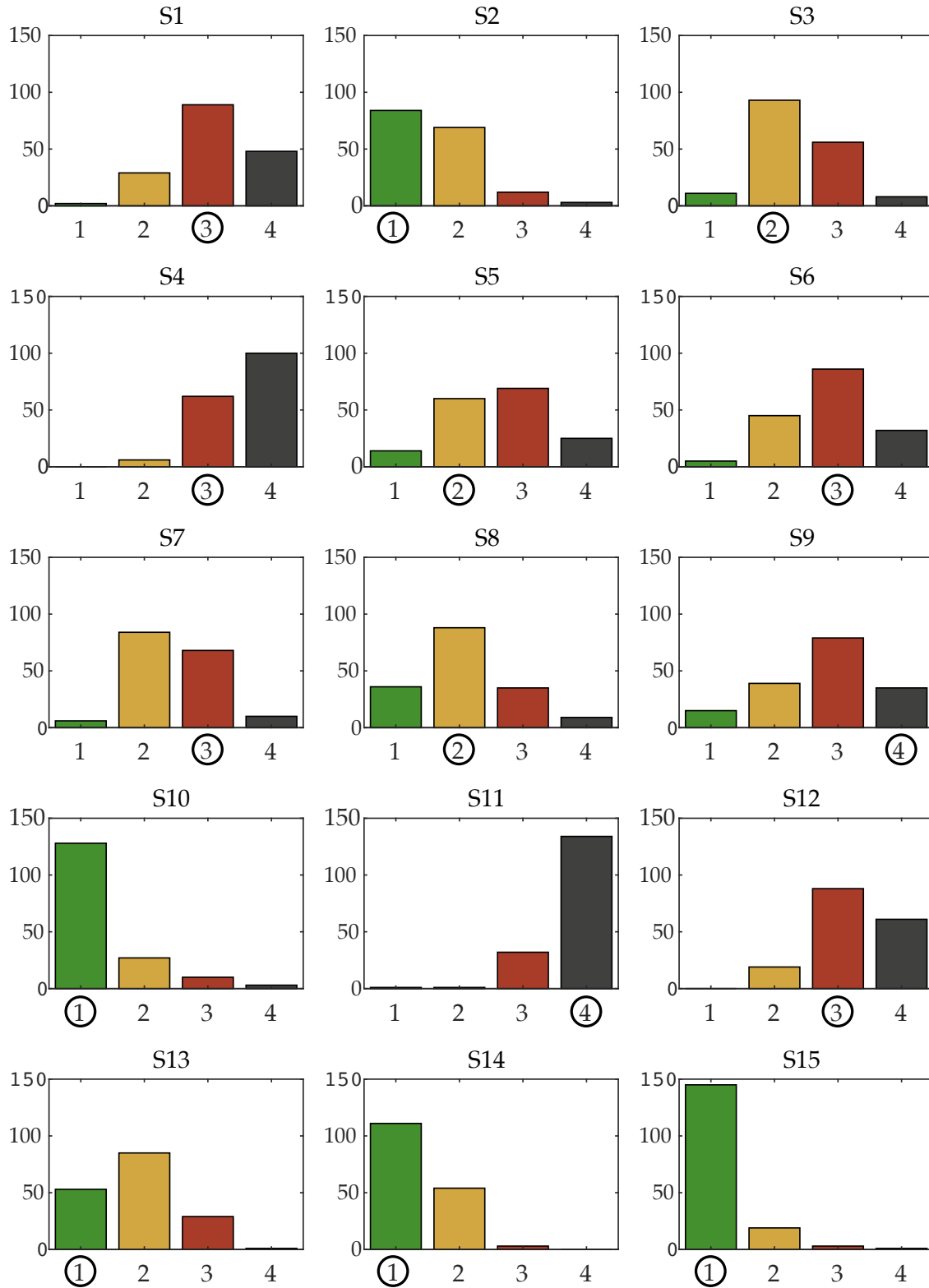


Figure 3.1: Histogram of the flag choices of the respondents for the fifteen scenarios, where the preferred answers of the experts are indicated by circling the corresponding number below the colored bars. The colors green, yellow, red and black correspond respectively to acceptable behavior, moderately transgressive behavior, seriously transgressive behavior and severely transgressive behavior. Note that the preferred answer of the experts not always corresponds to the most frequently chosen answer by the respondents.

scenario less seriously than the experts. If, for example, the respondent indicated a green flag (1) while the experts indicated a black flag (4), the result would become $1 - 4 = -3$. Please be reminded that a difference in more than one flag, so in more than 1 unit number, results in a linearly increasing error, as well as that a deviation in one direction, is valued equally erroneous as a deviation in the other direction. Columns 16, 17 and 18 are left unchanged and will be used to create subgroups in the statistical analysis. A **second matrix** calculates the absolute value of the numbers in the first matrix. By doing so, it is assured that a deviation in one direction, is valued equally erroneous as a deviation in the other direction when summing over the rows of the matrix to create a new row with a numerical value equal to the sum. This number is the basic number on which the further analysis is run, as it indicates the *total deviation*, expressed in error units per respondent, compared to the experts' answers. The lower the number, the better the correspondence to the experts' assessment.

Third, the so-called *total deviation* is analyzed by dividing the respondents in two groups based on whether they followed the training or not. Since this analysis is part of the main research question of this thesis, the full analysis of the statistical procedures that are followed, are described here at length, while for later analyses, the reporting will be limited to the results indicating the statistical significance. Table 3.5 summarizes the test statistics. Zooming into the test statistics, the median value is the same for both groups, at 8 error units. The mean score of the participants (8.67 ± 2.78 , $N=43$) is higher than that of the control group (8.27 ± 2.78 , $N=127$), indicating that, on average, they had a greater total deviation and thus corresponded less closely to the experts' assessment. To follow up on this, a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test will later be performed, after studying the distributions of both subgroups in more detail. Although Table 3.5 shows that both groups have similar means and standard deviations, their skewness and kurtosis differ. Both groups exhibit positive skewness, but it is more pronounced among the participants than the control group, indicating a stronger rightward skew. Similarly, while both groups show positive kurtosis, the participants display a higher value, suggesting a broader tail.

Statistic	Training group	Control group
N (Valid)	43	127
N (Missing)	0	0
Mean	8.67 ± 2.78	8.27 ± 2.78
Median	8	8
Skewness	0.915 ± 0.361	0.562 ± 0.215
Kurtosis	0.837 ± 0.709	0.673 ± 0.427

Table 3.5: Statistical Summary of the total deviation for the two groups

Next, a Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test are performed to see whether the data in the subgroups significantly differ from a normal distribution. As can be seen in Table 3.6, the total deviation for the training group, $D(43 = 0.15)$, $p = 0.012 <$

0.05 and the total deviation for the control group, $D(127 = 0.09)$, $p = 0.01 < 0.05$, were both significantly non-normal.

Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Training group	0.154	43	0.012	0.921	43	0.006
Control group	0.092	127	0.010	0.968	127	0.004

^a Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3.6: Tests of normality of the total deviation for the two groups

This implies that when studying whether the training group and the control group have a different total deviation, these cannot be based on the means of the sample. However, performing a Mann-Whitney U-test poses less stringent conditions on distribution of the data and will be used. As Field 2009 suggests that care should be taken when comparing grouped data with different variances, the homogeneity of variance is first studied. For the total deviation, as can be seen in Fig. 3.7, Levene's test for homogeneity of variance indicated that the variances were equal for the training group and the control group $F(1, 168 = 0.099)$, $p = 0.75 > 0.05$. The homogeneity of variances between the groups was confirmed using Hartley's F_{max} test. The variances of the training group and control group were 7.701 and 7.706, respectively. The calculated F_{max} equalling 1.00065, which is close to 1, indicating minimal variance difference. Therefore, we conclude that the variances between the two groups are homogeneous, satisfying the assumption of homogeneity of variances.

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	0.099	1	168	0.754
Based on Median	0.222	1	168	0.638
Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.222	1	165.317	0.638
Based on trimmed mean	0.109	1	168	0.742

Table 3.7: Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance

Hence, proceeding with the Mann-Whitney U-Test is justified. Table 3.5 suggests that the medians between the two subgroups were equal; nevertheless, the Mann-Whitney U-Test was performed to confirm whether the distributions of the two groups differ significantly in terms of their ranks, which could imply a difference in medians. The total deviation for the training group (median = 8) did not significantly differ from the control group (median = 8), $U=2554.5$, $z=-0.635$, $p=0.53 > 0.05$. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of ranks between the two groups.

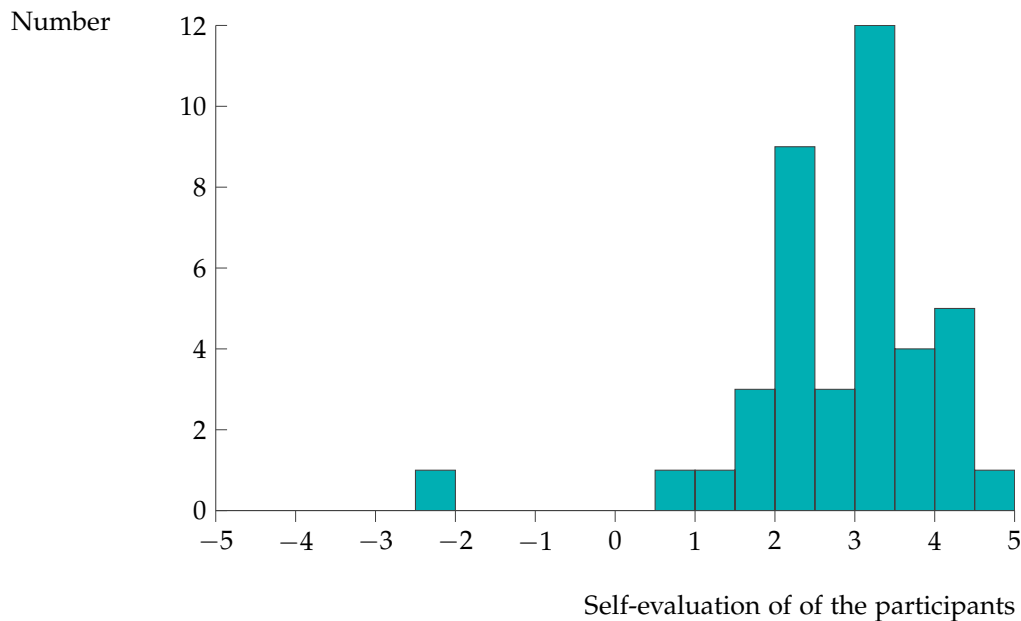


Figure 3.2: Self-assessment of competence by the participants

3.4.3 Self-assessment of competence by the participants

For those who followed the training, i.e., the participants, the survey ended with the question: “If you needed to self-assess whether this training has made you more or less able to evaluate transgressive behavior, allowing you to provide a more nuanced perspective that enriches discussions about such events, what would you indicate?” This could be indicated with a slider ranging from -5 to +5, where a negative result indicated people felt less able to assess TB, while a positive result indicated people felt more able to so. This variable is further denoted the ‘self-assessment of competence’. The data is displayed in Fig. 3.2 on page 62. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test are performed to see whether the data differs from a normal distribution. As can be seen in Table 3.8, the self-assessment of competence is not significantly different from a normal distribution according to the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, $D(40) = 0.139$, $p = 0.051 > 0.05$. However, given the fact that this is so close to the limit of the significance, the results of the shapiro-Wilk test are also taken into account. As can be seen in Table 3.8, the self-assessment of competence significantly deviates from a normal distribution according to the Shapiro-Wilk test, $W(40) = 0.869$, $p < 0.001$.

Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Training Group	0.139	40	0.051	0.869	40	<0.001

^a Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3.8: Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests for self-assessment of competence.

Next, an analysis is performed to assess whether significant deviations from the null condition provide grounds to reject the hypothesis that training did not lead to improvements in participants' self-assessment of competence, i.e. that the median was 0. Table 3.9 shows that the null hypothesis is rejected based on the One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, which returned a significance level of $p < 0.001$. The test statistics confirm strong evidence against the null hypothesis, indicating that training significantly improved participants' self-assessment of competence. The effect size, calculated as a rank-biserial correlation, reflects a strong association between training and competence, with a value of 0.846, calculated from Eq. 3.1:

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{5.350}{\sqrt{40}} = 0.846, \quad (3.1)$$

indicating that training substantially impacts participants' perceived competence.

**One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Summary
for the self-assessment of competence**

Total N	40
Test Statistic	808.000
Standard Error	74.388
Standardized Test Statistic Z	5.350
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	<.001

Table 3.9: Hypothesis Test and One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Summary for the self-assessment of competence.

3.4.4 Self-Assessment by the respondents

The results of two self-assessment questions, that are also used by SENSOA, are shown in Fig. 3.3 and Fig. 3.4 on page 64. In general, the predominantly chosen answer to these questions was 'somewhat agree', although this may also be due to a combination of a central tendency bias or social desirability bias. Also, people may be more inclined to agreeing with questions, known as the acquiescence bias. Comparing their assessments from a descriptive and relative point of view, it can be noted that while people seemed more confident about being able to recognize TB, they were a bit more divided concerning their abilities to assess complex cases of TB. This could be expected as the former is a matter of recognition, while the latter requires a post-hoc assessment of the situation, requiring analytics and cognition.

A Pearson correlation analysis was then performed to look at the relationship between participants' self-assessment of their ability to assess complex cases of TB and their total deviation. For participants who attended the training ($N = 43$), a positive but non-significant correlation was found between self-assessment and test scores ($r = 0.241$, $p = 0.06 > 0.05$). However, as the p-value is very close to the significance limit

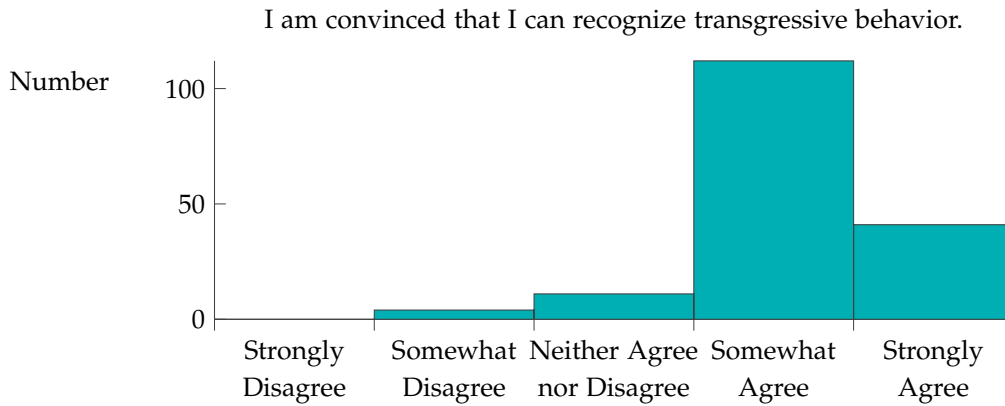


Figure 3.3: Histogram of a self-evaluation of the respondents whether they would be able to **recognize** TB.

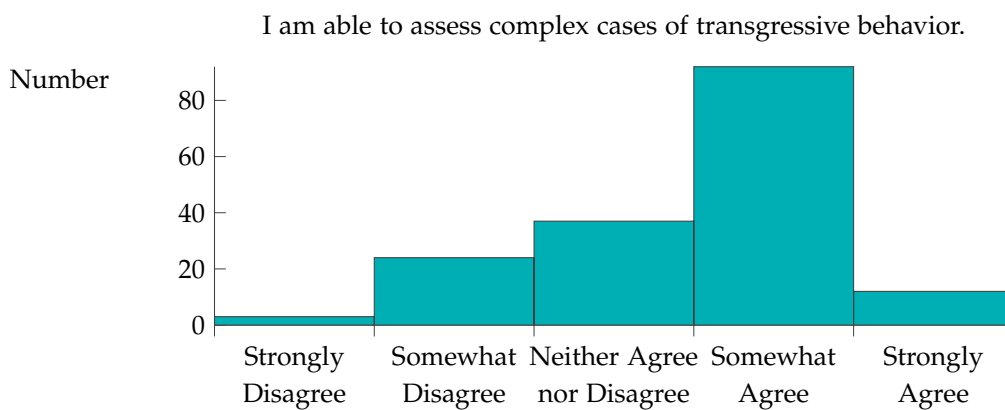


Figure 3.4: Histogram of a self-evaluation of the respondents whether they would be able to **assess** TB.

of 0.05, and given the lower number ($N = 43$) of respondents, raising the limit of the p-value to 0.1 increases the power of the test, while acknowledging it also increases the chance of a Type I error, i.e., where the null hypothesis would be incorrectly rejected and an effect is found when there is none. As such, the above tests are significant at the $p=0.1$ -level. In contrast, for participants who did not attend the training ($N = 125^1$), a weak negative and non-significant correlation was observed ($r = -0.144$, $p = 0.054$) and here the number of respondents is too high to accept to increase the power of the test. Finally, Fisher's z-transformation was employed to assess the statistical significance of the difference between these two correlation coefficients. As is detailed in the calculations in Appendix B15, the analysis revealed that the difference between the two groups was significant ($z = 2.15$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that training attendance influenced the relationship between self-assessment and actual test performance. The former results indicate that training has a positive effect on the self-evaluation of the participants. This could in part be explained by the fact that participants in the training group become more aware of their own learning processes and capabilities during the training. This heightened awareness could lead to more accurate self-assessments. During the training, the participants also receive feedback on their thought process,

¹ Note that 2 of the originally 127 respondents had missing data and were excluded from this part of the analysis.

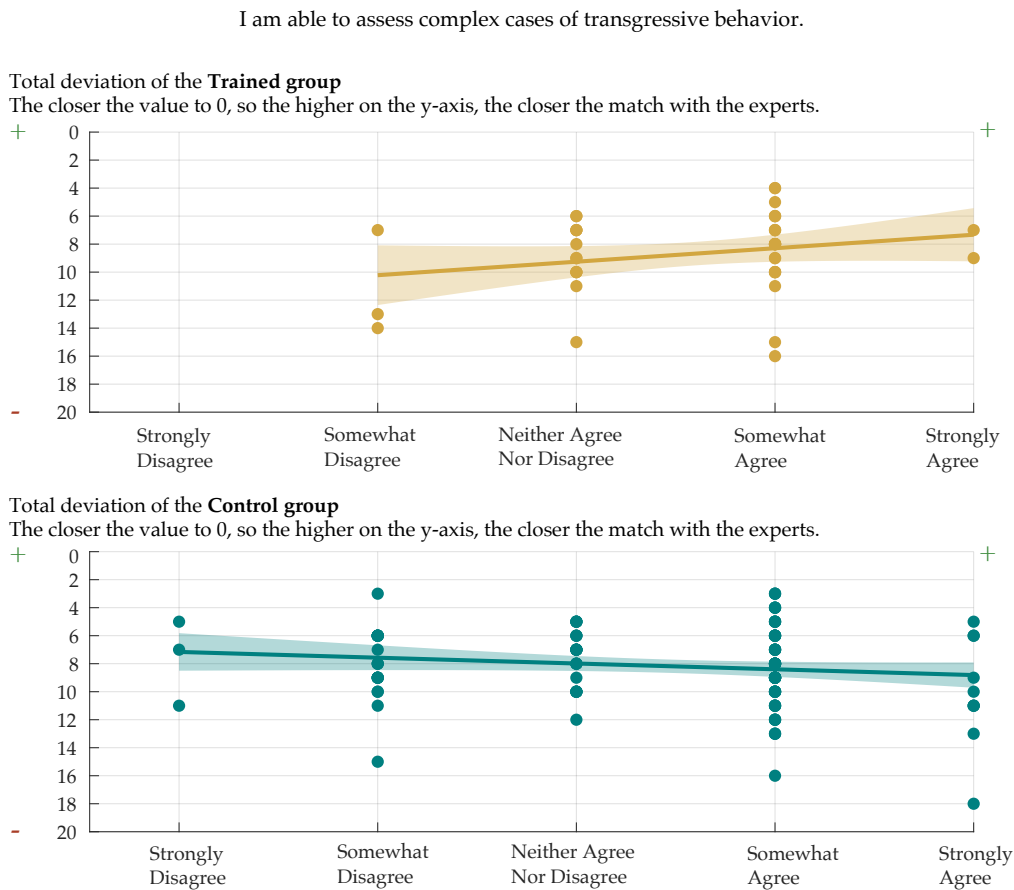


Figure 3.5: Training attendance influenced the relationship between self-assessment and actual test performance, indicated by the total deviation on the y-axis. Note that the lower the value, so the closer it is to 0, the better, indicated by a green + sign, while a high deviation from the experts' assessments, is indicated by a red - sign. On top of the data, a trendline and its 95% confidence interval is plotted.

thus calibrating better their own performance. Another benefit of training is increased confidence levels, also reflected by the positive values for their self-assessment of competence.

3.5 Discussion

This chapter explored the impact of developing a training tool, based on the SENSOA Flag system, to assess transgressive behavior at Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). A training was developed and based on a survey containing fifteen scenarios that commonly occur at IHEs, including bullying, harassment, (sexual) violence and deviance. The results of the training group and a control group were scored against the assessment by a group of experts. It is positive that, while the SENSOA Flag System is stretched beyond its original use, the experts were able to use the reinterpreted criteria for the assessment of a wide variety of scenarios. Irrespective of this success, the following difficulties were however reported on: **first**, the SENSOA expert indicated that the interaction of behavior in their system is always between

two persons, one of which displays TB with respect to the other. In some of the scenario's of this thesis, this condition is relaxed, e.g., scenario's S2 and S8 about asking a befriended colleague to preside a PhD jury. The question is asked from one professor to the other, and one could focus on this interaction, or one could look at the consequences for the PhD student or the other PhD students. After all, in S8, the opinion of the president of the jury has been under the influence of the promotor for a long time, thus hampering the president's neutrality. This can be either to the advantage or disadvantage of the PhD student, having an impact on their development and future career. At the same time, even if the president favors the PhD student, this is unfair towards other PhD students who do not have this advantage. In such cases, it is not always clear towards whom there is TB. **Secondly**, another example of relaxing conditions is scenario S6 where a postdoc was threatened and blackmailed concerning their prior relation with a doctoral student would be exposed, a case of workplace violence. In this example multiple behaviors at multiple times and with multiple people are described, rendering the case realistic, yet too complex to be handled in one assessment. What SENSOA then advises is to break this up into different assessments and not to focus only on one, which was the case in this thesis. Although it was considered to implement multiple assessments for one scenario in this thesis, this idea was renounced as one scenario would then weigh more than other scenarios in the statistical analysis comparing the participants who followed the training to the control group, rendering too much importance to one specific scenario. **Thirdly**, TB towards the institute is not defined within the SENSOA framework. Taking again example S9 about the conflict of interest arising when two professors help each other out in various commissions to both of their advantage: this impacts the IHE as a whole and all other people that work there who's projects will not be supported due to two people blindly supporting each other. Moreover, this behavior will be almost impossible to prove, unless one of the parties admits to it, which leads to the question how the institute could react in such case. A second goal of the SENSOA system is to also instruct about the reactions one can take in case TB occurs. In this case, no reaction is possible as no-one is present to establish this unethical behavior. And in the rare case that this situation comes to light, all the institute is left to do, is to take disciplinary actions, not correcting the behavior but reacting to it.

Next, the discussion turns to the data that was gathered from the training group and the control group. From the current data, it cannot be concluded that the test participants had better results than the control group. Also, none of the two groups display a higher variance in the responses. This absence of an effect may have various causes. The survey questions could, e.g., have been too difficult or too easy to distinguish sufficiently between the training group and the control group. Analyzing the total errors for all respondents per scenario indicated a large discrepancy level between questions: there was a factor of 7 between the question that had the most errors (scenario 9: 204 error units) with respect to the question that had the least errors (scenario 15: 29 error units). Also, the training and survey may need to be more aligned and, e.g., focus more on green-flag behavior, as 5 out of 15 scenarios are in fact

green, while the training mostly focuses on TB. One could also argue that the online respondents would be people having a stronger interest and/or more affinity with TB, e.g., researchers involved in such studies or other workers who are active in the support system of IHEs, as they were distributed via email and LinkedIn via the social network of the author of this work. To test this possibility, the data of the two departments where the training sessions were organized, have been isolated. In these two groups, no specific affinity with the topic was expected. In both groups, people who followed the training and people who did not follow the training could be compared and no significant effect of the training was found. One of these departments (MOBI) was predominantly populated by academics while the other department (INFRA) was composed of mostly of ATP, so a last test was performed to check if the training had more impact on academics than on ATP or vice versa, but no statistically significant effect was observed in the current data. However, it needs to be noted that the size of the datasets when observing subgroups was very small and the results should be evaluated after more training sessions in different departments at more faculties have been performed. Finally, the participants of the training group were all volunteers and one could wonder if the people that need the training the most, and may have the least affinity with the subject, will have participated.

These reflections highlight that the current conclusions are preliminary and more data should be gathered by performing the training at a variety of departments, faculties and possibly also at various IHEs. Moreover, the survey should be further distributed to more IHEs as well, as the current participants are mainly active at the 5 Flemish universities and the 17 colleges (i.e. an IHE that is not a university) are currently underrepresented. Moreover, a higher representation from the non-Flemish IHEs and IHEs abroad would be welcome. Further, it can be studied if the training has more effect for a specific category of personnel. If this would be the case, the intervention could focus primarily on the groups that would benefit the most from the training.

A second further study could look at the impact of the training on the assessment of TB, by comparing whether the participants scored either more to the left or to the right of the experts assessment, and comparing their tendency to that of the control group. This could then indicate that the training made them assess certain cases as more severe than others and vice versa.

Similarly, it could be studied whether the training had more impact on certain forms of TB, although it should be noted that many forms occur simultaneously and the borders between them are not strict, complicating such assessment.

Furthermore, the training did have a positive impact on the self-assessment of competence by the training participants. This in itself constitutes a positive and valuable effect and may lead to more people following the training, also those people who need it most. The relationship between their self-assessment of competence and final result, as compared to the same relationship for the control group, indicated moreover that there was a difference between both groups, impacting the awareness of their own abilities differently than that of the control group. This is valuable information to convince people further to participate in the training sessions.

Finally, focusing on the research design and the training, it would be interesting to also do a longitudinal study with some people, evaluating them before the training, immediately after the training and a few months later, to see if the time at which the survey is taken, impacts their result. Several participants noted that the training was very intense and, while they felt they learned a lot, they also experienced feelings of confusion. This remark circles back to the social desirability bias mentioned before, as, except for 1 participant, all indicated a positive self-assessment of competence. This confusion could also have led them to overthink the situations too much and a longitudinal study could shed some light on this.

A final lesson learned for future research, is to let go of the use of gender neutral pronouns in most scenarios. While the intent was to be inclusive, several participants and members of the expert group mentioned this actually complicated the readability of the cases. They argued that inclusiveness can also be implemented in different ways, e.g., by making sure different genders are considered in the questions, as well as different sexual orientations. Also terms as co-workers are gender-neutral without using gender-neutral pronouns. Moreover, some of the scenarios could be considered offensive by the way they are currently written. Taking, e.g., scenario 4 where intersectionality is considered: the scenario starts from 'A person of color that is part of the LGBTQ+ community (...)'. This wording in itself can be offend people and a different way of wording could be more applicable, e.g., 'An incoming postdoc from Asia who is an activist for the LGBTQ+ community (...)', which focuses less directly on the persons color and orientation. Given the current data, the Flag System by itself is assigned an orange flag in fostering a cultural change to tackle transgressive behavior in the Belgian Higher Education.

4

Conclusions and future work

Following the rise of the social #MeToo movement in Belgium, a wave of media backlash on transgressive behavior (TB) in the higher education emerged. The issue of TB in Belgian higher education was first mentioned in the Belgian press at the end of 2018, when UHasselt professor *L.V.* received his resignation following a disciplinary procedure at the university, whereas the prior judicial procedure did not lead to a conviction. However, in November 2017, the issue of TB gained significant media attention when the case of *De Pauw* surfaced and he was convicted in court at the end of 2021. Shortly after, cases of TB at IHEs flooded the media, with the case *D.T.* at the VUB being the first of many, indicating that such behavior was present at all Flemish universities. Tackling TB is a so-called ‘wicked problem’, and a culture change is needed. The VUB has chosen for an approach at two speeds: first, during the crisis-period, the momentum of the crisis situation was used to improve the procedures, the reporting body and the communication protocols in these procedures within a short time-frame of six months. Secondly, various longer-term efforts were set up to study the matter more profoundly and thus instigate a preventive approach to tackle TB. This thesis is part of the second phase.

Transgressive behavior comes in various forms, ranging from bullying, harassment, discrimination, violence to sexual misconduct, including assault and rape. These can occur simultaneously and evolve over time. Also the boundaries between them are not strict. The lack of a unified definition for TB, with only its various forms specifically outlined, impeded comprehensive studies and understanding of the issue. Moreover, from a policy perspective, i.e., the perspective from which this thesis was written, it is important to have such an overarching definition to be used in regulations, codes of conduct, ethical guidelines and procedures. Based on a narrative literature study including 21 articles, the following definition was put forward:

Transgressive behavior at institutes of higher education can be defined as any form of conduct that results in a range of negative outcomes for the recipient, including psychological and/or physical harm, compromised well-being, an unjust, hostile, or offensive academic environment. These actions, whether single, repeated or patterned actions, in-person or online, perpetrated by an individual, group or institute, may utilize power imbalances and employ aggressive, abusive, or deceitful means to intimidate, harm (including sexual harm), belittle, intimidate or exert control over one or more persons or the institution itself. Such behaviors may violate the integrity of a person, a group of persons, social norms, or

Working definition of
Transgressive Behavior

organizational standards. They can be based on factors such as gender, sex, physical appearance, ethnicity, race, religion, political viewpoints, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or socioeconomic background and moreover, these actions can be intentional or unintentional, as well as overt or covert, yet are always characterized by their adverse nature.

This definition has several limitations. It risks categorizing every isolated incident as TB, including minor conflicts like heated scientific discussions. Also, it includes both intentional and unintentional actions, which could lead to misinterpreting accidental harm as TB. Moreover, the inclusion of online behavior without specifying its impact, risks being overly broad. Furthermore, it may erroneously classify normal academic competitiveness and cultural misunderstandings as TB. Finally, it might even misclassify some university disciplinary procedures or policy changes as TB. While the definition is broad enough to cover various forms of TB, these weaknesses deserve more attention when implemented.

Next, the underlying reasons why the higher education system is so vulnerable to this behavior are covered as well as policies and measures that can be implemented by the university governance to tackle the problem. From an external point-of-view, the introduction of New Public Management in the higher education played a pivotal role. While transparency and accountability are positive outcomes, its implementation in the form of an extreme focus on KPIs, such as h-indices and external project funding, has however fostered a highly stressful, overly competitive and toxic environment. In such environments, wellbeing is compromised and TB may occur more frequently, as at least one of the three basic psychological needs from the self-determination theory, i.e. relatedness, is compromised. As an IHE, it is not easy to withstand this pressure. Externally however, the academic administration should continue to openly acknowledge this problem so that the community knows they are aware and care about this. Yet, people also expect action, and internally, coping strategies should be implemented to prevent cascading this system too far down to group level or even individual level. Moreover, IHEs should be weary of institutional hypocrisy, when their actions contradict their own ethical guidelines, norms and values. In such cases, finding the optimal balance between transparency and discretion may be hampered as institutional hypocrisy hampers trust. As a simple step, IHEs should openly acknowledge the problem of TB, and communicate continuously about the steps that are being taken. Furthermore, systemic barriers to addressing and reporting TB should be removed. One solution is to keep promoting the internal and external support channels and organizations in communication, on the website and on physical boards or leaflets on campus. This communication should at all times be consistent to prevent confusion. Also, whenever people do take the step to report, care should be taken to avoid secondary victimization and possibly retaliation. Moreover, in total organizations, dominance and power imbalances are emphasized, enhancing the occurrence of TB. IHEs should therefore implement structural changes within the organization to foster a culture of respect, trust, dialogue, and inclusion, including developing policies that address these power dynamics. These power dynamics and imbalances that are so inherent to IHEs create dependencies that only training, emphasizing ethical leadership and assertive commu-

nication, can tackle. This connects directly to the role of people in leadership positions at IHEs, as they can make a difference in how TB is handled. When handled incorrectly, secondary victimization and a toxic culture will be the result. However, when people are trained and develop the needed skills and competences, they can make a change for the good. This should also be taken into account in the hiring process of personnel, as well as when people are promoted to such positions. The fact that the VUB promotes lifelong-learning and inscribes in the rector's general strategic plan that it is functioning as a self-learning organization, the threshold to implement training sessions on TB in its leadership trajectories is expected to be low.

In line with the above, this thesis then evaluates the impact of a training session based on the SENSOA Flag System to assess TB. SENSOA is the Flemish expertise center for sexual health, providing information, education, and advice on a broad spectrum of topics related to sexual health and well-being. They are the author of the SENSOA Flag System, a framework to help professionals promote discussion around (transgressive) sexual behavior for children, young people and adults. A response guide is also included to help all involved parties discuss the behavior in the scenarios. In their system, behavior is assessed using six criteria and then rated using colored flags, where green represents acceptable sexual behavior, yellow represents moderately transgressive sexual behavior, red represents seriously transgressive sexual behavior and black represents severely transgressive sexual behavior.

This thesis explores the redefinition of the original framework into six criteria: mutual consent, voluntary engagement, equality, level of functioning, context, and impact. These criteria are proposed to assist staff members in higher education in conducting more nuanced evaluations and fostering deeper discussions about the various cases of TB occurring within this context. Therefore, an online survey has been developed and distributed using social media and cascading emails, asking the participants to rate the severity of 15 common cases of TB in the higher education. For each case, a rating was asked on a 4-point scale, representing the green, yellow, red and black flag, thus representing acceptable behavior (green), moderately transgressive behavior (yellow), seriously transgressive behavior (red) to severely transgressive behavior (black). At the same time, a training program was developed, outlining the basics of TB in the higher education as well as the adapted SENSOA framework. This training was then offered to 43 participants, spread across two departments: 32 participants from the research group MOBI, consisting of mainly academic staff, and 11 participants from the Infrastructure Department of the university consisting of administrative and technical personnel.

This brings us to discuss the final research question of this thesis, whether we give the SENSOA Flag system a green, orange or red flag to tackle TB at IHEs. To start, as the framework was developed to assess sexual behavior among adolescents and young adults, the system is truly stretched in this thesis. It was already clear when discussing the 15 scenarios with the experts, one of which is working at SENSOA. Initially, this expert reported difficulties on applying the SENSOA flag system to scenario's S6 (where a postdoc was threatened and blackmailed concerning their prior relation with a doctoral student would be exposed, a case of workplace violence) and

S9 (where a conflict of interest arises as two professors make an agreement to support each other in various commissions to their own benefit, a case of deviance, unethical behavior). After alignment within the expert group however, a consensus was found, also for these cases. Although it was agreed upon that the SENSOA system was clearly stretched, the six redefined criteria allowed for all scenario to be assessed uniquely and unanimously. Despite this success, the thesis highlights several challenges in applying the SENSOA framework to assess TB in IHEs. Firstly, the SENSOA system usually considers interactions between two individuals, where one displays TB towards the other. However, this thesis relaxes this condition by allowing to include groups or even an organization or institute to be involved. Secondly, the complexity was increased by allowing with multiple behaviors and multiple parties to be included.

Although it is too early to draw final conclusions yet, the current and preliminary data do not support the hypothesis that the training that was developed led to better scenario assessment by the training group when compared to the control group that did not follow the training. To look at it from an alternative point of view, the findings also suggest that the people who participated in the survey, master the skill of assessing TB equally well than the training group. The absence of a discernible effect between the training and control group could also suggest that the scenarios were too simplistic or overly complex, thus failing to differentiate the training group from the control group. The variance in total error rates per scenario further supports this hypothesis, indicating a high spread in question difficulty. Additionally, the alignment between training content and the scenarios in the survey needs reconsideration, as the current training mainly emphasizes TB, whereas green-flag behavior is also a major part of the survey. The respondents, being primarily recruited through the author's professional network, could skew the results due to their inherent interest in TB, suggesting a potential bias. However, this was further explored by isolating data from two departments with no expected affinity for TB, yet no significant training impact was found, regardless of the academic or ATP status of participants. The small dataset size when analyzing subgroups necessitates caution, highlighting the need for expanded training sessions across diverse departments, faculties and IHEs for more robust conclusions. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of the participant group raises questions about whether those most in need of the training participated. Returning to the competitive landscape of academia, those most affected by stress and thus more susceptible to TB may lack the energy to participate in training sessions, potentially resorting to less healthy coping mechanisms instead. The current study's conclusions are therefore preliminary, calling for extensive data collection across more IHEs, including a wider representation of both Flemish and non-Flemish IHEs. Examining the training's impact on different forms of TB, despite the complexity of overlapping forms, could provide further insights. Notably, the training positively influenced participants' self-assessment of competence, a valuable outcome that might encourage broader participation in the future if well communicated. This relationship between self-assessment and actual performance, which was not observed in the control group, underscores the training's potential in enhancing self-awareness, thereby potentially motivating participants to advocate for wider training adoption. Furthermore, future research design should also

consider a longitudinal design, assessing participants before, immediately after, and in the months following the training to evaluate the sustained impact and mitigate the initial confusion reported by some participants. Finally, future work should also focus on integrating all measures and tools into a comprehensive toolkit that is sufficiently general to be applied to all IHEs, but leaves the needed room to individualize the training needs and response guides according to the local codes, procedures, context and culture. Only then can we go from best practices to next practices.

5

Appendix

Criterion	Questions?	Simple explanation
Mutual consent	Are all parties okay with this behavior?	All persons involved are okay with this behavior. Whenever someone or a group of persons does not want this behavior, or no longer want it, it is okay to say this. If another party indicates some behavior is no longer wanted, nobody will not insist.
Voluntary Engagement	Is nobody putting pressure to allow this behavior? Can it be refused without the fear of negative consequences?	The behavior is accepted because it is wanted. Not for any reward, to do anyone else a favor, or to prevent another person or group of persons to become mad or frustrated, but solely for the pleasure of the behavior. No force or extortion is used.
Equality	Is there any power imbalance between the involved parties?	There is no power imbalance between the involved parties that could lead to doubt on whether the behavior is voluntary.
Level of functioning	Are all parties able to deal with the behavior at this moment? Did all parties get sufficient and timely information to deal with the situation?	The involved parties are fully accountable, have sufficient autonomy and are able to assess whether this behavior or situation is okay for them or for others. Even hierarchical equals, can be at different levels due to seniority or in numbers.
Context	Is the behavior adapted to the context?	The behavior is suited for the relevant context. Also, no third parties are offended by the behavior.
Impact	Can the behavior negatively impact any of the involved parties or third parties?	The behavior does not have a sufficient risk of negatively impacting any other party's way of working, career, or physical, emotional, or social integrity.

Table 1: Criteria to assess transgressive behavior in the IHEs.

	+ okay	+/- okay	- okay	-- okay
Mutual consent	With clear and valid mutual consent	There is no clear consent	There is no consent, there is clear rejection	There is repeated clear rejection
Voluntary engagement	Without any form of coercion, bribery or threat; without the use of deception or persuasion; not imposed by surprise.	There is little coercion or persuasion used; the parties can easily withdraw from the behavior; no secrecy is enforced.	There is clear coercion, bribery, violence, blackmail, persuasion, or pressure is used; one cannot withdraw from the behavior; secrecy is enforced.	There is severe coercion, bribery, threat, blackmail, pressure or violence; one cannot withdraw from the behavior; secrecy is enforced.
Equality	Parties are equal or there is no perceived abuse of power , not even by third parties.	There are complaints or suspicions that the inequality between the parties is causing some tensions or there is some authority or dependency relationship.	There are complaints or suspicions that the inequality between the parties is causing concerns or there is a reasonably large authority or dependency relationship.	There are complaints or suspicions that the inequality between the parties is causing major problems or there is a large authority or dependency relationship.
Level of functioning	Parties are sufficiently competent ; autonomous and accountable; they are at similar seniority levels.	There is slight doubt about a parties' autonomy or accountability, whether they had all the necessary info available in time, or whether they have similar seniority levels.	There is considerable doubt about a parties' autonomy or accountability, whether they had all the necessary info available in time. They are at different seniority levels.	Parties are insufficiently autonomous and accountable ; they do not have all the necessary info available in time. They are at very different seniority levels.
Context	It is not offensive to third parties; it takes place in an intimate setting without harm, not even to third parties.	The behavior does not quite fit the context ; there is still a small risk of exposure; it could mildly harm , possibly even third parties.	The behavior does not fit the context ; there is risk of exposure; there are considerable consequences , possibly even for third parties.	The behavior does not fit the context ; there is severe risk of exposure; there are severe consequences , possibly even for third parties.
Impact	There is no harmful impact (psychological, physical, social, economical, reputational) for any of the parties involved, nor for third parties.	There is a small risk to harmful impact (psychological, physical, social, economical, reputational) for some of the parties involved, possibly for third parties. E.g. a one-time unwanted verbal or less (sexually) intimate touching or contact; annoying but not scary; support present; limited reach.	There is a real risk to harmful impact (psychological, physical, social, economical, reputational) for some of the parties involved, possibly for third parties. E.g. Repeated unwanted less severe (sexual) touching or contacts; one-time serious and intimate unwanted sexual contacts; wide reach; little support; there is fear or secrecy; the perpetrator is even aware of the harm.	The danger is great , the consequences and harmful impact (psychological, physical, social, economical, reputational) can be great; repeated red behavior or repeated serious intimate unwanted (sexual) touching or contacts; wide reach, absence of support, there is fear or secrecy; there is trauma; the perpetrator is even aware of the harm and risks prosecution.

Table 2: Assessing the six criteria

Appendix B

B1 Scenario 1

A PhD student or postdoctoral researcher is being yelled at by a person that is higher on the academic ladder, e.g., a professor, who is pushing them to work harder to publish sooner and more articles. This undermines their self-confidence, leads to stress, and poor work-life balance. How do you assess the behavior of the professor?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	- okay	The person is caught off guard and cannot give consent.
Voluntary engagement	- okay	Pressure is being applied to the PhD student to work extra hard.
Equality	- okay	The person is higher on the academic ladder and holds a position of power over the PhD student.
Level of functioning	- okay	It is inappropriate to misuse a position of power and apply pressure on PhD students.
Context	- okay	Some pressure may be felt, but it's inappropriate to shout in a work setting.
Impact	- okay	This impacts the PhD student's self-confidence. They also experience stress and a decline in well-being, which could have negative consequences for the senior academic's reputation.
Flag		Due to multiple criteria scoring - okay, a red flag is assigned. The situation involves an imbalance of power, resulting in significant stress and reputational risks.

B2 Scenario 2

Two professors from different faculties work together on some projects and have lunch or dinner every now and then, particularly after a meeting but occasionally also for fun. They promise each other not to talk only about work, but sometimes the project does come up. A PhD student of one of the professors is about to defend their PhD thesis, and the promotor asks the other professor to be the president of the Jury. The president of the jury should be neutral. How do you assess this behavior as seen from the viewpoint of the PhD student?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	NA	The selection of jury members, including the chairperson, is not in the hands of the PhD student. Given that the relationship between the student and chair isn't very close, the student would likely consent to the selection. The relationship described is not overly close and does not compromise the chairperson's neutrality.
Voluntary engagement	NA	There is no indication of pressure.
Equality	NA	There is no use of a power difference.
Level of functioning	NA	Not applicable.
Context	+ okay	This behavior is normal in this context.
Impact	No expected impact	There is no anticipated impact.
Flag		The green flag is assigned since no negative impact is expected, the context is normal, and there is no misuse of power.

B3 Scenario 3

A co-worker is invited to an online meeting, but only then discovers all other colleagues have agreed to meet in person. The online co-worker is excluded from most of the lively debate and has difficulty getting their opinion across. They are also unable to attend the coffee break after the meeting, where discussions continue and most decisions are made. How do you assess the behavior of the colleagues?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+/- okay	The person is caught off guard and cannot give consent.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	There is no pressure or coercion.
Equality	+/- okay	There is an imbalance in numbers, with one person versus the rest of the team.
Level of functioning	?	We don't know the intent behind the colleagues' actions. Depending on whether the location of the meeting was intentionally withheld, this criterion could score + or +/-.
Context	+/- okay	It's inappropriate in a work setting to exclude people.
Impact	+/- okay	This affects the employee's ability to do their job well and may also impact the team's effectiveness.
Flag		The yellow flag is assigned due to partial exclusion, which affects the employee's work performance and may impact the team.

B4 Scenario 4

A person of color who is part of the LGBTQ+ community is discriminated against by their supervisor. Stupid jokes are regularly made, not directly, but when this person is around to hear them. Other co-workers do not stand up for them but instead laugh at the jokes out of fear of becoming the next victim. How do you assess the behavior of the supervisor?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	- okay	The person is caught off guard and cannot give consent.
Voluntary engagement	+/- okay	The supervisor exerts pressure on the team from their position of power to participate in this behavior.
Equality	- okay	There's an imbalance in numbers, with one person versus the team. Additionally, the supervisor has clear authority over the team, which follows along with this behavior.
Level of functioning	- okay	The supervisor should realize that it's inappropriate to make discriminatory comments.
Context	- okay	It's never appropriate, even in a work setting, to discriminate against people.
Impact	- okay	This behavior can negatively impact the employee and the team, which lives in fear of being the next victim. The supervisor may also suffer negative consequences.
Flag		The red flag is assigned due to discriminatory behavior, misuse of power, and the negative impact on both the employee and the team.

B5 Scenario 5

At a team-building event, the evening is filled with laughter, food, and (also alcoholic) drinks. The atmosphere is cozy and informal. As the evening progresses and people drink more, they start playing around. They all engage in this. During a playful discussion while doing the dishes, a co-worker is suddenly hit on the back by the director, who wound up a moist towel and used it as a whip. How do you assess the behavior of the director?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+/- okay	The person is caught off guard and cannot give consent.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	There are no signs of pressure or coercion.
Equality	+ okay	The professor is in a hierarchical relationship with the post-doc, but there is no clear abuse of power of this position in this informal context.
Level of functioning	+/- okay	Due to the informal situation and enhanced by alcohol use (see context), the professor displays behavior that is not expected of a person at that level of functioning (professor) at work.
Context	+/- okay	The context and situation are that of an informal party where alcohol is used. More could be allowed during such a staff event, and the atmosphere can be lighter, but respect for the integrity of others should be maintained.
Impact	- okay	The postdoc wishes to report it. The professor may suffer negative consequences while the impact for the postdoc is limited to the occasion on the condition that the behavior is immediately stopped after signaling this.
Flag		As there is at least one criterion (impact) receiving a - okay status, a green flag is excluded and further considerations are made to assess whether it is a yellow, red or black flag. The behavior occurred once, without the professor being made aware of the boundaries. In a work context, this would be inappropriate but in an informal setting with alcohol present, boundaries inevitable become more vague. There were more people present that could provide support if needed. Also, the long-term impact of the professor is not negligible, putting the risk on negative impact with them. For these reasons, a yellow flag is assigned.

B6 Scenario 6

A PhD student and a postdoc in the same department have started a consensual (mutual agreement) private and intimate relationship. They haven't told anyone because they're afraid of the impact it could have on the group. However, their relationship has ended because the postdoc cheated on the PhD student with a new PhD student on the team. The first PhD student now threatens to inform the department head unless the relationship with the new PhD student is immediately ended. The postdoc feels blackmailed. How do you assess the behavior of the first PhD student toward the postdoc?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	-- okay	The postdoc does not consent to this.
Voluntary engagement	-- okay	The PhD student is pressuring the postdoc.
Equality	No	The PhD student is in a lower hierarchical position, but it's the PhD student's behavior that's being assessed.
Level of functioning	-- okay	Blackmailing or extorting someone negatively impacts their functioning.
Context	-- okay	Such behavior is not acceptable in higher education. We don't extort people.
Impact	- okay	Negative effects on the postdoc's career and reputation are expected.
Flag		Given that the PhD student is aware that blackmail isn't acceptable in higher education, the severity and intent to pressure someone to end a relationship out of revenge, the lack of support for the postdoc, and the wide reach of the case due to multiple involved parties, a red flag is assigned. It's described as threatening (not career destruction), but no action has been taken yet.

B7 Scenario 7

After the new year begins, co-workers wish each other a happy new year in various ways. One person dislikes being kissed on the cheek and prefers a handshake, fist bump, nod, or verbal greeting without physical contact. Although this colleague has indicated this many times, they are still kissed on the cheek by the department secretary. How do you assess the behavior of the department secretary?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	- okay	The individual has previously not consented to this.
Voluntary engagement	- + okay	The individual cannot always easily avoid the situation, creating pressure to endure the kiss.
Equality	+ okay	There is no abuse of power.
Level of functioning	+/- okay	While it's generally acceptable to kiss a colleague on the cheek in certain situations, employees are expected to adapt their behavior when a colleague is reluctant.
Context	+ okay	This behavior is appropriate in this context.
Impact	+/- okay	The individual feels uncomfortable due to this behavior, which can also negatively impact relationships with colleagues.
Flag		As there is at least one -okay, a further assessment is needed. A red flag is assigned due to repeated behavior. If there had been no repetition, a yellow flag would apply better.

B8 Scenario 8

Two professors from the same faculty are friends. They regularly have lunch and dinner, meet with their families outside work, and even go on holiday together. They discuss their PhD students and work in general, even students they don't share. They talk about the students' strengths, weaknesses, and conflicts they've had with them. A PhD student of one of the professors is about to defend their PhD thesis, and the promotor asks the other professor to be the president of the Jury. The president should be neutral. How do you assess this behavior from the viewpoint of the PhD student?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	-okay	The choice of committee members and the chair is not up to the PhD student. Given the close relationship between them, the PhD student could argue that the chair's neutrality is compromised.
Voluntary engagement	-okay	The selection of the chair is imposed without recourse for the PhD student.
Equality	-okay	A PhD student holds a lower rank than a professor.
Level of functioning	Impact (withdrawal)	There is a potential impact.
Context	-okay	The chair is expected to be neutral and should not have a predetermined opinion based on long-term exchanges with the supervisor. If a tie-break is needed, the chair's neutrality is a must-have.
Impact	-okay	The impact affects the PhD student's career, particularly if the chair needs to break a tie. The PhD student cannot contest this decision or seek support. Other PhDs may also perceive this as unfair.
Flag		Supervisors should be aware that the chair must guarantee neutrality, and there are other potential choices available. (Red if serving as a committee member)

B9 Scenario 9

One co-worker is on a commission approving university budgets, while another approves internal research budgets. They have an informal meeting after work, have a beer, and agree to approve budgets in each other's favor. Nobody can prove they had this conversation. How do you assess the behavior of these two professors from the viewpoint of the university and its employees?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	-- okay	The institution considers this unethical behavior.
Voluntary engagement	- okay	Both individuals pressure each other.
Equality	NA	Not applicable.
Level of functioning	- okay	Such underhanded deals compromise the institution's functioning.
Context	- okay	This behavior does not fit this context.
Impact	-- okay	This impacts the institution's operations.
Flag		Due to unethical behavior and high impact on the institution and its people. There are no support mechanisms available for this.

B10 Scenario 10

A 60-year-old professor in Belgium from campus A starts an intimate, consensual relationship with a 23-year-old international master's student on campus C. The student has a two-year visa and a scholarship. The professor is not involved in the student's program, and they never meet on campus. They work at different campuses and are part of different faculties. How do you assess the behavior of the professor?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+ okay	Both give full consent to this situation, confirmed after consultation.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	Both voluntarily enter this relationship, confirmed after consultation.
Equality	- okay	There is an unequal relationship between the professor and student, further compounded by the visa status of the international student. However, there is no abuse of this power imbalance.
Level of functioning	+/- okay	The professor should know that forming relationships with master's students is inappropriate.
Context	+/- okay	Both work and study in a different department, without direct contact with each other.
Impact	+/- okay	There could be negative consequences if this is reported.
Flag		

B11 Scenario 11

A co-worker from Research Group A has published an article contradicting findings from Research Group B. They receive insulting emails, comments, and social media messages from colleagues in Group B, even outside of work. Some came to the office to threaten them while they were alone, and now they're scared to work late hours. How do you assess the behavior of Group B's co-workers?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	- okay	The employee is caught off guard and cannot give consent. They also do not want this behavior across multiple channels.
Voluntary engagement	+/- okay	The employee cannot easily escape the behavior. Alternatively, if the team leader of the other group would have been involved, this would change to - okay, same in case the team leader pressures the research group to harass the employee and -- okay in case the threats become physical and real.
Equality	- okay	There is an imbalance in numbers.
Level of functioning	- okay	It is inappropriate for the research group to respond like this to a scientific publication.
Context	-- okay	The person is harassed even in their personal context.
Impact	-- okay	The harassment can negatively impact the employee's well-being. The research group may also suffer negative consequences, such as reputational damage.
Flag		This is repeated behavior where boundaries in the work context are clearly defined. Threatening is never okay behavior. The intensity is high as several channels are used, even extending to physical threats. There does not seem to be support for the victim and the clearly and highly impacts their wellbeing and psychological safety.

B12 Scenario 12

A postdoctoral researcher uses a PhD student's results in an article without giving credit. The postdoc also dismantled a measurement setup and claims it was needed to build a new one, but no new setup has appeared. The postdoc is spreading rumors that the PhD student is greedy and ungrateful. How do you assess the postdoc's behavior?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	- okay	The PhD student is caught off guard and cannot give consent.
Voluntary engagement	- okay	Spreading rumors adds extra pressure on the PhD student to not continue.
Equality	- okay	There is an imbalance between the PhD student and the postdoc.
Level of functioning	- okay	It is inappropriate for a researcher to not give credit to the correct individuals and to spread rumors.
Context	- okay	The PhD student's privacy is not protected as the postdoc is spreading rumors broadly.
Impact	- okay	The harassment may negatively impact the PhD student's well-being and academic reputation. The postdoc may also face negative consequences, such as reputational damage.
Flag		

B13 Scenario 13

Two heads of departments are at the Faculty Council when the Dean announces a plan to move departments to different buildings due to changes in staff. One head states that they don't agree and won't comply as they expect more staff to join their department. The Dean dismisses the comment, bluntly states the decision has been made, and closes the discussion. How do you assess the behavior of the Dean?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+ okay	Both have willingly entered into the discussion during the meeting.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	Both are voluntarily present at the meeting and willingly engage in the discussion.
Equality	+/- okay	The dean is above the professor in hierarchy, but this difference is part of the context.
Level of functioning	NA	
Context	+ okay	The faculty council setting involves the dean making announcements and decisions, which are sometimes controversial. Leaders sometimes have to make tough calls.
Impact	+/- okay	The impact is limited within the context of the meeting.
Flag		This concerns a decision by the dean, who is brief but not aggressive. They have the right to end the discussion since the decision is made and should be respected.

B14 Scenario 14

A professor who obtained a tenure-track position and a senior postdoc are friends. They meet for a barbecue with their families. Although they try not to discuss work, it inevitably comes up. The professor remembers that the postdoc needs to email the final version of a paper and asks them to send it quickly via their smartphone. How do you assess the behavior of the professor?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+ okay	Both discuss work during their private moments.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	Both voluntarily take the initiative to engage.
Equality	+ okay	Technically, the tenure-track (TT) professor is hierarchically above the postdoc, but they've grown as peers and have remained friends outside of work, where equality is evident.
Level of functioning	+ okay	Both have nearly the same level of functioning. One has just obtained their TT position, but this is recent.
Context	+ okay	In the private context where work is discussed, it's okay for something to be disclosed.
Impact	+ okay	Minimal to non-existent.
Flag		The TT professor made a spontaneous remark, with no systematic pattern. The request can easily be refused since both interact amicably and operate at nearly the same functional level.

B15 Scenario 15

Two students become a couple in their third bachelor year. One becomes an assistant and teaches a course in the final year of the master's program, which their partner attends. The assistant mentions this to the professors, and it's agreed that they won't grade their partner's exam. They remain in an intimate relationship. How do you assess the behavior of the assistant?

Criterion		Notes
Mutual consent	+ okay	Both are willing participants in this relationship.
Voluntary engagement	+ okay	Both are in this relationship voluntarily, and this existed before the new situation.
Equality	+/- okay	Although one is now an assistant, they've grown as a couple from a position of equality.
Level of functioning	+/- okay	The assistant has a higher functional level than the student, who has faced some learning difficulties.
Context	+ okay	If this relationship had not existed before, it would not be desirable for an assistant to start a relationship with a student in an academic context.
Impact	+/- okay	Appropriate precautions were taken in time to minimize the impact on both parties' functioning and the institution. Open communication has also been positive.
Flag		

Appendix C

C16 Fisher's z-transformation

C16.1 Calculation of Pearson Correlation Coefficients

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is calculated using the following general formula:

$$r = \frac{\sum(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum(y_i - \bar{y})^2}}. \quad (1)$$

For the group that attended the training:

$$r = 0.241,$$

For the group that did not attend the training:

$$r = -0.144.$$

C16.2 Fisher's z-transformation

The Fisher's z-transformation of a correlation coefficient (r) is given by:

$$z = \frac{1}{2} \ln \left(\frac{1+r}{1-r} \right) \quad (2)$$

Applying the Fisher's z-transformation for the group that attended the training:

$$z_1 = \frac{1}{2} \ln \left(\frac{1+0.241}{1-0.241} \right) \approx 0.245, \quad (3)$$

and for the group that did not attend the training:

$$z_2 = \frac{1}{2} \ln \left(\frac{1-0.144}{1+0.144} \right) \approx -0.145. \quad (4)$$

C16.3 Standard Error of the Difference Between Two Fisher's z-scores

The standard error of the difference between two Fisher's z-scores is computed as:

$$SE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{N_2 - 3}}, \quad (5)$$

where $N_1 = 43$ and $N_2 = 125$ are the sample sizes for the two groups, so inserting these values into Eq. 5:

$$SE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{43 - 3} + \frac{1}{125 - 3}} \approx 0.182. \quad (6)$$

C16.4 Z-score for the Difference Between Two Fisher's z-scores

The z-score for the difference between two Fisher's z-values is computed using Eq. 3, 4, and 6:

$$\begin{aligned} z &= \frac{z_1 - z_2}{SE} \\ &= \frac{0.245 - (-0.145)}{0.182} \approx 2.15 \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

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