

Screaming without a voice

Description

This has been an interesting week, filled with fun, sun and revelations.

This was going to be a post about all the fun I had in Miami at Science Online Oceans last week. But itâ€™s not. It was going to be a post about my experiences with the science online community in Miami, which I count myself lucky to be a part of. But itâ€™s not. It was going to include photos of what I did, including seeing alligators, herons and more. But itâ€™s not.

As fun and exciting as that was, in light of recent developments, it doesnâ€™t really seem all that important right now.

For those who are not aware, an important figure in the science online community, who acted as a mentor to many of us, has resigned his position in midst of statements from women whom he had sexually harassed.

This is how this horrible situation came to light:

On Monday, writer Monica Byrne added a note to her blog post from last year about an experience with sexual harassment. In that note, she identified the man as Bora Zivkovic, the editor of Scientific Americanâ€™s blog network and a major force in the online science community (<http://monicacatherine.wordpress.com/2012/10/09/this-happened/>).

In her post, she describes that during a coffee meeting to discuss her pursuit of science journalism, Bora constantly veered the conversation into the area of sex and extra-marital affairs. Understandably, she was uncomfortable, but due to his influential position, she kept silent.

Afterward, Bora followed the coffee conversation with a Facebook message, where he said that it was great to meet her and, as for all the sex talk, he wrote, â€œwhy not.â€•

Following that, she communicated with him detailing her feelings and what he was doing wrong, which he eventually apologized for. â€œHe said heâ€™d been very busy recently, but that he was very sorry,â€• she wrote. â€œHeâ€™d been in the midst of a â€œpersonal crisisâ€• at the time, which was now â€œhappily resolved.â€•â€•

The online science community was already in the midst of another incident last weekend, also involving Bora, Scientific American, with the addition of the blogger Danielle Lee (http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/10/14/danielle_lee_called_an_urban_whore_how_scientific_and/). This incident is what inspired Monica to out Bora as the harasser in her post.

When this allegation against Bora came out, people in the community were shocked, appalled and very vocal about it. Others were more understanding, saying that one incident isnâ€™t a trend, and that the man made a mistake.

Then, others started writing about similar experiences on Monica's blog. Some dismissed them as simply getting on the bandwagon and trying to get attention, while others perked up their ears.

Maybe this is real, they said. Maybe this has happened before, but people were afraid. Maybe, just maybe, the man who we all revere in this community is not all he is cracked up to be.

But, Bora did post a note on his website when this news came out, acknowledging that this situation with Monica occurred (<http://blog.coturnix.org/2013/10/15/this-happened/>). So they were no longer simply allegations, but were true.

In his post, he wrote, "It is not behavior that I have engaged in before or since. I hope to be known for my continued professional and appropriate support of science writers rather than for this singular, regrettable event for which I am deeply sorry."

And people accepted this apology, and it seemed to have been dealt with internally at Scientific American a year ago when the incident occurred. But, the conversation didn't stop.

The organizers for the ScienceOnline conference, which I have been a part of for years, issued a statement on Wednesday detailing the role of Bora going forward. He was an integral part of putting the conference together over the past several years, but due to his admission of guilt, he resigned from his position with them.

Kathleen Raven, a friend of mine from the Science Online conference, posted on her website (<http://sci2morrow.com/2013/10/16/mixed-up/>) her experiences with harassment. Though she does not name her harassers, her points that describe the harassment she'd dealt with for years stuck a chord in everyone.

Then, Hannah Walters, a friend I have known for years, and whom I profoundly respect and admire, wrote a post about her experience with Bora (<https://medium.com/ladybits-on-medium/857e2f71059a>). Her post, entitled "The Insidious Power of Not-Quite-Harassment," deals with harassment from Bora that is made from an off-hand inappropriate joke, discussing sexual experiences and more.

After these two posts were put online, the community could no longer deny that Bora had been sexually harassing women for years and that something had to be done. There was shock, anger and sadness rippling through our community. But most of all, there was support, respect and kindness for the women who came forward and brought these dark secrets that they have been carrying around to light.

Bora tweeted on October 16th: "No need to defend me. Kudos to @monicabyrne13 and @hannahjwaters for having the courage to speak up. I was wrong. I am sorry. I am learning."

Then, on Friday, Kathleen, who had written a post detailing harassment throughout her life, wrote another post describing two particular experiences with harassment (<https://medium.com/the-power-of-harassment/3e809dfadd77>). In her post, which I highly encourage everyone to read, even though it is a difficult one, she goes into great detail of exchanges she had with Bora where he crossed the line repeatedly, made overt sexual comments, kissed her, propositioned her and more.

It was one of the only things in my life that I read and was so emotionally impacted by, that I was in stunned. And from my conversations with other people, I was not the only one to be shocked, disgusted

and mortified that someone had to experience such harassment.

This caused many people to further question their interactions with Bora, indicated by the hashtag on Twitter [#ripplesofdoubt](#) on Twitter. And when it became sad and negative, people began tweeting with the hashtag [#ripplesofhope](#) to inspire.

Then, later on Friday, Scientific American released a statement saying that Bora had resigned from his position of Blog Editor for the magazine. You can read the statement here:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/pressroom/pr/corporate-press-releases/2013/bora-zivkovic-resigns-from-scientific-american/>

This is not over, and the conversation about preventing this behavior needs to continue. Not only in the online science community, but every community.

Hopefully, if we can take anything away from what has been revealed here about a man many people considered a colleague, mentor and friend, is that complacency is the enemy. Looking the other way and not speaking out are the wrong way to handle anything, especially harassment.

I am proud to be a member of the science online community, and have so many friends that I depend on, trust, respect and admire. But we must move forward, evolve, and make things better for the future.

I do not know how we can accomplish this, but I look forward to moving forward â€” together.

To everyone in this community: my friends, colleagues and those I have not yet had the pleasure to meet, I support you. We support you. Always.

Category

1. Bora
2. harassment
3. science online

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