

PRESS RELEASE ON BEHALF OF PROFESSOR AVITAL RONELL

Professor Avital Ronell, an NYU tenured professor, has been the subject of Title IX allegations made by Nimrod Reitman of sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, stalking and retaliation. Reitman, was her doctoral student from the spring of 2012 to June 2015.

Ronell has consistently, categorically, and unqualifiedly denied all of Reitman's allegations, the first and only such allegations made against Ronell during her forty year career as an educator.

The Title IX investigation took place over eleven months, during which Ronell had no opportunity to confront, question, or cross-examine Reitman regarding his allegations.

No evidence was found of sexual contact, which Reitman had alleged took place in Ronell's Paris apartment in May, 2012 (prior to his attending NYU as a graduate student), and during Hurricane Sandy in October, 2012.

The media has nonetheless pounced on Reitman's unsustained and unproven allegations as if they were fact, completely ignoring that the investigation found them to be not credible.

Reitman alleged that while staying with Ronell during his visit to Paris in May, 2012, he was the subject of repeated and unwanted sexual contact. Shortly after this stay, Reitman gave her a gift of a book by André Gide, a renowned gay writer. His inscription reads: "For my most wonderful Avital, indeed we would always have Paris for yet another aspect of our own private musical "Grapheme" – tenderly – always – ever – Nimrod Paris 12.5.12."

Two years later, in 2014, Reitman also emailed her about his beautiful memories of their time in Paris together: "Sending tender love and kisses, I too remember and reminded of our beautiful scenery in Paris – vivid and always occurring I send you music, love, and kisses." (11/21/2014).

This email is flatly inconsistent with his claim of sexual contact.

Reitman alleged further sexual contact in October 2012, when he insisted that Ronell stay with him for two days during Hurricane Sandy, while her apartment was without power or water. The Report found his allegations unproven and, by definition, not credible.

Yet Ronell continues to be accused and maligned over accusations of sexual relations with Reitman that were thoroughly investigated for eleven months and were deemed not credible.

Reitman also submitted “medical records” to the Title IX investigators in an attempt to corroborate his claims. These were incomplete, unilaterally redacted by him and, bizarrely, some records were in his own handwriting. The investigators found the medical records of “questionable reliability,” calling the truth of his allegations into serious question.

Reitman’s allegations of stalking were based on Ronell’s regular and frequent communications and in-person meetings with him. The Report disagreed, again contradicting Reitman’s version of events, and found that each of them had frequently initiated such emails and, in fact, the correspondence was mostly related to their working relationship.

Reitman’s allegations of retaliation against Ronell - - that she negatively impacted his professional career since his graduation from NYU in the spring of 2015 by actively thwarting his job prospects - - were also determined to be unfounded. Reitman had never made a complaint, so there was nothing for Ronell to retaliate against. Further, Reitman admitted that Ronell actually helped him secure two post-graduate positions.

The Title IX Report found that in her emails to Reitman, Ronell used pet names and made statements of an intimate nature, which they determined to be unwanted by Reitman, and were violative of NYU’s sexual harassment policies. However, these emails were written in a

particularly non-sexual context, and an even cursory review of Reitman's emails to Ronell show that if he was not *initiating*, then he was at least encouraging the type of language he later claimed constituted harassment. Ronell, a lesbian, describes the correspondence between herself and Reitman, who is gay, as largely gay-coded, with literary allusions, poetic runs and obviously exaggerated expressions of tenderness that were often initiated and returned by Reitman. Her emails to him contain nothing of a sexual nature, and examples of Reitman's emails to Ronell include the following:

- “Mon Avital, beloved and special one... I don't know how I would have survived without you. You are the best, my joy, my miracle. Sending you infinite love, kisses and devotion, your – n.” (6/29/13);
- “Thank you most darlingst. On this rainy day I too hold you and thank you for everything”. (12/6/2014);
- “Sweet Beloved, I was so happy to see you tonight, and spend time together. It was so magical and important, crucial on [sic] so many ways. Our shared intimacy was a glorious cadence to our time in Berlin. Thank you for these moments of togetherness and utter and pure love!...Infinitely, - n” (1/17/2015);
- My beloved Avital, Just sending you infinite kisses and love. Thank you for your being my most precious blessing. Loving, your – n. (3/16/2013);
- “Beloved...Missing you and loving you ! – n” (2/4/2015);
- “Baby. It was so wonderful seeing you today. You looked wonderful...I miss you terribly and await seeing you already...”(2/13/2015);
- “Honig most, dearest one...Sending love and misses. Je t’embrasse”. (03/19/2015); and

- “Dearest, I have not heard from you all through this oriental trip...Please drop me a line to let me know you are well, I have been worried about you...hugs, n”.  
(7/29/2015). [Written after Reitman received his doctoral decree].

Almost all of the emails from Reitman included a request to review and edit his writings. He had chosen Ronell as a luminary in his field and was clearly exploiting her in that regard. Indeed, in his acknowledgments section of his (unpublished) thesis he wrote: “I thank Avital’s teaching, careful reading, sensitive support...and her unremitting listening to all my whims.” (10/15/2015).

Ronell had no reason to believe that any of her correspondence with Reitman was objectionable. He persistently wrote to her with expressions of “love and infinite gratitude,” exalting her intellectual powers and she lobbed back similar appreciations. These mutual emails, devoid of any sexual language or context whatsoever, provide the sole basis for the Title IX findings. This alone should be cause for concern.

The Title IX investigators then conjectured based solely on these emails, that unwanted non-sexual physical contact may have occurred. In fact, there was no such physical contact between them.

Witnesses with personal knowledge of Reitman and Ronell (including colleagues, students and co-workers of the relatively small NYU Department of German), and of their academic and public appearances, uniformly and categorically refuted any indication or observation of any untoward sexual or harassing conduct between them. On the contrary, many witnesses relate conversations with Reitman in which he praised Ronell and who testified to his pursuit of her time and attention.

The type of language Ronell used in her emails to Reitman is no different from the language that she used with many others and that Reitman used with her, to which there was no sexual context whatsoever. Reitman saw in this use of language an opportunity to manipulate Ronell by adopting and encouraging a tone between them while simultaneously denouncing her in starkly vicious terms to others.

On June 29, 2013, Reitman wrote to Ronell: “Mon Avital, beloved and special one, I only now relieved (sic) your beautiful and exquisite message...I thank you for your infinite understanding and sensitivities which are always beyond measure, all of which I reciprocate with tenderness and love. I thank you so much for walking me through this catabasis [descent]. I don’t know how I would have survived without you. You are the best !!! I love you so much. You are the best, my joy, my miracle. Kisses and devotion always. Yours – n.”

Yet, shortly thereafter, Reitman sent an email to Gregory Lennon (unknown to Ronell) dated July 20, 2013 stating: “Tomorrow, I see the monster.”

On further occasions, he wrote to others referring to Ronell as “witch”, “evil”, “psychotic”, “bitter old lady” and other derogatory terms, while simultaneously bubbling over with effusive affection in his communications with her. This duplicity undermines his claim to have been sexually harassed by her.

Further undermining his claims, is that Reitman, over a period of three and one-half years, never once complained to anyone at NYU about Ronell’s alleged harassment. Nonetheless, Reitman stated to the Title IX investigators that he had complained to the Chair of the German Department and the administrative assistant in the Department, but they each denied such complaints..

Reitman never availed himself of NYU's well-publicized procedures for complaints of sexual harassment, crafted to allay such conduct and shield complainants from retaliation. Reitman, who claimed to be the subject of almost "daily" acts of sexual harassment and unwanted physical contact by Ronell, failed to make a single complaint until August 2017 - - two years after he secured his doctoral degree and only then, when he was unable to secure a tenure-track position.

The inability of Reitman to find a job and not any actual or perceived, sexual harassment of him by email, is what this case is about.

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