

Sexual Harassment at the Workplace



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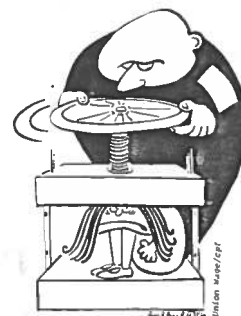
AASC
Alliance Against Sexual Coercion

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What Is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment at the workplace takes many forms. These include verbal harassment or abuse, subtle pressure for sexual activity, as well as rape and attempted rape. To refuse sexual demands from the boss—or co-workers or clients—means the risk of losing your job. So sexual demands in the context of work become coercive because they are supported by and reinforced through the use of economic power. Because of the threat of losing their jobs—or losing out on promotions or raises—women are often forced into sexual activity with their employers in order to keep jobs or to obtain benefits, promotions and raises.



Printing costs for this brochure were provided by a Women & Work Small Grant from the Center for Research on Women in Higher Education and the Professions, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Neither the Center nor the College are responsible for the ideas expressed herein.

This brochure was developed and written by Rags Brophy, Mary Bularzik, Martha Hooven, Freada Klein, Liz Cohn-Stuntz and Lynn Wehrli. We would like to thank Rochelle Lefkowitz and Constance Enzweiler for their assistance.

Myths & Facts

An elaborate series of myths supports all forms of violence against women. These myths are based on assumptions about men's and women's "natural" biological and psychological make-up. They ensure that women feel guilty rather than violated. Therefore, women are less likely to speak up or to take action to eliminate harassment at work. The following myths, reflecting current attitudes, serve to perpetuate sexual harassment at the workplace.

MYTH: *Women harassed at work shouldn't talk about it.*

FACT: We can only begin to eliminate sexual harassment at the workplace when we share and understand our experiences. If we remain silent, workplace harassment will continue to be seen as a personal problem rather than a social issue.

MYTH: *Sexual harassment is not a serious social problem—and it affects only a few women.*

FACT: Women suffer from sexual harassment regardless of their appearance, age, race, marital status, occupation, or socio-economic status. In a 1976 survey in *Redbook Magazine*, 88% of the 9,000 respondents reported that they had experienced one or more forms of unwanted sexual advances on the job.

MYTH: *Women invite sexual harassment by their behavior and/or dress.*

FACT: Sexual harassment is not a sexually motivated act. It is an assertion of power expressed in a sexual manner.

FACT: Often women are expected to act or dress seductively both to get and keep their jobs.

MYTH: *Only women in certain occupations are likely to be sexually harassed.*

FACT: Waitresses, flight attendants and secretaries are not the only victims of sexual

harassment. Women who work in factories, at professional jobs—and all kinds of jobs—consistently report this problem.

MYTH: *It is harmless to verbally harass women on the job or to pinch or pat them. Women who object have no sense of humor.*

FACT: Harassment on the job is humiliating and degrading. It undermines a woman's job performance—and often threatens her economic livelihood. Women victimized by sexual harassment suffer emotionally and physically. We should not be expected to endure degradation with a smile.

MYTH: *A firm "no" is enough to discourage any man's sexual advances.*

FACT: Because people believe women say no when they really mean yes, men often dismiss women's resistance. Men's greater physical, economic and social power enable them to override women's protests.

MYTH: *Women who remain in a job where they are sexually harassed are masochistic—or are really enjoying it.*

FACT: Women's lower socio-economic position in the U.S. means that many are unable to quit their jobs or find new employment.

MYTH: *Only bosses are in a position to harass women at the workplace.*

FACT: Co-workers and clients can also harass women at the workplace. Clients threaten to withdraw their business. Co-workers make work intolerable. Both complain to the boss—or already have the boss' support.

MYTH: *Women make false charges of sexual harassment.*

FACT: Women who speak out against harassment meet with negative reactions, ranging from disbelief and ridicule—to loss of job. Women have little to gain from false charges.

MYTH: *If women can't handle the pressure of the working world, they should stay home.*

FACT: Women work out of economic necessity. Staying home is not an option for most working women. Nor—as we know from current publicity on wife abuse—is staying home a protection against sexual harassment.

Sexual Coercion: A Form of Violence Against Women

Violence against women is a common occurrence in the United States. On the average, one out of three women will be raped during her lifetime; a woman is beaten by her husband every 18 seconds; almost nine out of ten working women responding to a survey report some form of undesired sexual attentions on the job.* These hard facts have caused us to take a hard look at the society—not just the individuals—that creates and promotes this behavior. Rape, wifebeating—and sexual coercion—are all forms of violence against women. All reflect and reinforce women's subordinate status in our culture.

Violence against women assumes many forms—but comes from common causes. The forms include:

- Forcible rape
- Wife abuse
- Sexual harassment on the job
- Unwanted sterilization
- Abusive advertising and pornography
- Institutionalization of women

* Figures for rape and wife abuse are based on the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. These reflect reports to the police, trends from 1960-1974, and estimated unreported incidents. The figure for sexual attentions on the job is from a 1976 survey conducted by Redbook Magazine. ④

Women do not need to be actual victims of blatant violence themselves to be affected by it. Even awareness of the rates of physical violence can be experienced as psychological violence. Aspects of female socialization—like absence of self-defense skills and direction of anger inward—fall within a broad definition of violence against women because they increase the likelihood of violence in women's lives.

Widespread violence creates widespread fear. This fear makes it difficult for women to assert independence. In other words, violence against women is a highly effective tool of social control. As with all violence, it is the last line of defense when the more subtle controls have failed.

Sexual harassment on the job must be understood within the context of our society as a whole. Two patterns create the climate for all violence against women. One is our country's history of relying upon violence as a method of problem solving. The other is that men are socialized to dominate women through the use and threat of violent behavior.

Many events in U.S. history have been accompanied by violence. The most obvious example is war. Violence has been used to block changes that threaten existing economic and political structures. Violence was used to prevent union organizing and deny basic civil rights to racial and ethnic groups.

Government use of excessive force has set a model for individuals. This model transmits the message that it takes the threat of force to bring desired results. Government policy-makers respond to crises—not to reasoned grievances or statements of need.

The mass media has added to the climate of violence—making it more visible and far reaching. World-wide atrocities are brought into our homes as a form of recreation. As violence becomes more familiar, television and film script writers develop more "creative" acts of violence. This escalating cycle of violence causes two trends: the imitation of violent behavior, and immunity to its real impact. ⑤

"Manhood" in U.S. society is defined by economic success and sexual prowess. Both these criteria are determined and judged by men. "Manliness" is earned by competing with other men for both these types of "rewards." Each contest is won by the willingness to use force.

When their manhood is questioned, men are expected to defend their honor by confronting the accuser, *and* by carrying out actions to "prove themselves."

Most men's opportunities for economic success are limited. So the most expedient way for a man to gain a sense of self becomes through asserting superiority over women. A man humiliated by his employer, for example, has social permission to beat his wife or have an affair. He can offset the threat to one aspect of his manhood with a "manly" performance in another.

Some specific current conditions cause threatened feelings in men:

- Increasing numbers of women dependent on their own earning power
- High unemployment
- Women's entrance into previously all-male occupations.

These trends give us reason to believe that sexual harassment on the job—and all forms of violence against women—may be increasing.

More than a reversal of these trends alone will be needed to eliminate the problem. Violence as a way to solve problems, and definitions of manhood are too ingrained in our culture. Domination—as an attitude and practice—joins violence on an international level to violence committed by one man against one woman. Unequal status of workers and employers, and unequal status of women and men, are two power structures which reinforce each other in cases of workplace harassment.

Sexual harassment is pervasive yet is widely unrecognized as a social problem. In raising the issue and selecting strategies for its elimination, we are guided by the successes and failures of efforts against other forms of violence against

women. We can analyze anti-rape group priorities—legislative reform, direct service and public education. This analysis can be applied, then, to designing an effective program focuses on sexual harassment at work.

The first step is to bring women together in a non-threatening environment to share experiences. Speaking out—and documenting the incidence and forms of sexual coercion—is a major part of defining it as a social problem. When issues become social problems, the responsibility is shifted from the victim to the aggressor. Resources then become available to explore and eliminate the problem. Important changes within the individuals raising the issue also take place. A sense of being able to affect one's own life replaces the sense of isolation. An understanding of the interconnections of conditions in one's life replaces confusion. Many specific organizational skills are learned as well. Both the process of enabling women to see their similar relationship to problems of violence—and achieving concrete results—contribute to empowering women, individually and as a group.



THOMAS/ATF

Conditions of Women Workers: Current Trends*

The proportion of waged women workers in the U.S. has increased dramatically in the past 25 years—from 29% of all workers in 1950 (or 18 million women) to 39% of all workers in 1974 (or 35 million women). Currently, more than one half of all women between the ages of 17 and 65 are in the paid labor force.

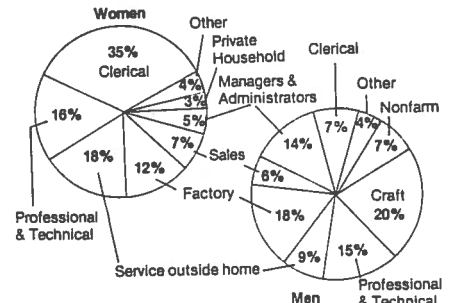
Women work for the same reasons men do—to provide for their own welfare and their families'. However, they are barely given the opportunity to do so. Wages are low for most workers. But women are paid much less than men—and the earnings gap continues to grow. In 1955, women's average wage was 64% of men's. In 1974, women's average wage was only 57% of men's.

In 1974, the median income for all full-time women workers was \$6,772. In the same year, the Bureau of the Census defined poverty as an annual income of \$5,038 or less for a family of four. This means that the woman worker earning average wages, supporting a family of four, earned only \$1,734 above the poverty level. Also, since 1967, the cost of living for the average wage earner has risen 80%, while the earnings of women workers have only risen an average of 60% since that year. A cost of living gap of 20% remains to be absorbed by working women.

* All statistics for conditions of women workers have been obtained from publications of U.S. Dept. of Labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Employment Standards Administration).

⑧

The occupational distribution of women is very different from that of men. This is demonstrated in the following charts for full-time employed persons, aged 16-65 in 1975.



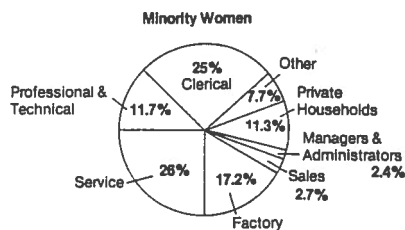
Women are more likely than men to be white-collar workers, but the jobs they hold are usually less skilled and pay less than those of men. Women are two-fifths of all professional and technical workers, but these women are mainly teachers and health workers. Women are less likely than men to be managers and administrators, and represent only about one-fifth of these workers. However, 78% of all clerical workers are women.

About 1 out of 7 women workers is employed in a blue-collar job, while almost half the men are in such jobs. Women are almost as likely as men to be working in factories, but they are very seldom employed as skilled craft workers—the occupation group for 1 out of 5 male workers.

More than 1 out of 5 employed women is a service worker as compared to 1 out of 11 men. Most service workers are employed in occupations other than private household work, such as maintenance and restaurant occupations.

In 1974, 4.6 million minority women were in the paid labor force. They represent 49% of all minority women in the U.S. population, and one-eighth of all women workers. The proportion of minority women in the labor force exceeds that of white women in all age groups above 25 years. The following chart outlines the 1974 occupational structure of minority women workers.

⑨



Recently, the changes in the occupational structure of minority women workers have been more marked than those of all women workers. For example, between 1960 and 1974, the proportion of minority women employed in professional and technical jobs rose from 7 to 12%. In clerical jobs, it rose from 9 to 25%. Over the same 14-year period, their proportion in private household work decreased from 35 to 11%.

In terms of the low level service jobs to which minority women previously had been limited, these figures are encouraging. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the majority of their positions have shifted merely from service work to clerical work. Although an improvement, clerical jobs are basically low paying and without opportunities for promotion.

Although earnings have increased for minority women workers, from an average of \$2,372 in 1960 to an average of \$6,611 in 1974, this is barely above the poverty level for a family of four. In comparison to the 1974 average earnings for minority men workers—\$9,082—minority women earn substantially less as well. In addition, the unemployment rate of minority women in 1975 was 14%, higher than the 8.6% rate of white women workers, the 7.2% rate of white men workers, and the 13.7% rate of minority men workers.

Low wages, low status occupations and high unemployment among minority women workers directly reflect their perilous economic position. These factors, coupled with pervasive racist attitudes of white employers and co-workers, demonstrate the particular vulnerability of minority women in regard to sexual harassment at the workplace.

The point of all these statistics is two-fold. First, women workers are in low status and low paying jobs. Secondly, the personal service aspects of most of women's work—clerical and service—make it difficult for women to limit work boundaries. This facilitates sexual harassment. An employer is likely to extend desires for sexual activity to his secretary who often performs "wife-like" duties such as preparing coffee and buying gifts.

To eliminate sexual coercion at the workplace, more than changes in job status and earnings are necessary. Sexist attitudes, along with racist and classist beliefs, are vital parts of the U.S. economic system. Not until an egalitarian and democratic work structure is established will sexual harassment be eradicated.

These realities convey profound implications for women's work lives. Monetary livelihood, to a great extent, determines women's consciousness and self-expectations, including what women will tolerate at the workplace. Most women have little autonomy or control over working conditions. We must answer constantly to an employer and are often powerless to change work situations. Thus, economic survival has been a major reason for difficulties in successfully combatting sexual harassment at the workplace.



Conditions of Women Workers: Historical Background

For many women, including labor organizers, sexual harassment has been treated as a "fact of life"—not a social condition which could be changed. Paulline Newman, an early organizer for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, knew that women garment workers were often harassed by foremen. Yet she considered it bad strategy to let such "moral" questions interfere with the important union negotiations over wages and hours.

There is not a factory today where the same immoral conditions (do) not exist . . . this to my mind can be done away with by educating the girls instead of attacking the company.*

Her solution—to blame the victims rather than the harassers—was an all too common one.

Yet occasionally we find reports of women acting together in their own defense. In her autobiography, Mary Anderson, the first Director of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, recounts an early strike (about 1915) in which the conduct of the foreman was a major issue. Since the foreman was known as one who "did not stop at anything," the women carried knives to protect themselves. As a result of this strike, the foreman was fired and wages were increased.**

* Harris, Alice Kessler. "Organizing the Unorganizable: Three Jewish Women and Their Union." *Labor History*, V.17 #1, Winter 1976. p. 16.

** Anderson, Mary. *Woman at Work*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1951. p. 56.

Rose Schneiderman, organizing for the Women's Trade Union League in 1908, tells of another instance, in which the owner of a shop had the habit of pinching the women whenever he passed them. When confronted, his reply was, "These girls are like my children." The workers' response was that they'd prefer to be orphans! Their willingness to take action brought an end to this harassment.*

Even when confronted with evidence of blatant sexual coercion, management cannot be relied upon to solve the problem. Jean Maddox recounts an episode from her organizing work during the 1940's. Management refused to respond to repeated complaints that a certain foreman forced women to sleep with him to keep their jobs. The women realized that the male union leadership would not take the complaint seriously, so they finally decided to take matters into their own hands. When management ignored a 4 p.m. deadline to fire the foreman, the women pulled the main switch and shut down the plant.

Then we all surrounded the foreman—women and men—and marched him to the gate. That was the end of him; he didn't come back.**

In many cases, though, women do not have group support and must individually defend themselves against sexual harassment. Refusing sexual advances—and keeping the job—is difficult. Women have reported pay cuts, demotions, and persistent humiliation when they have tried to keep their jobs without submitting to sexual demands. Tension and stress caused physical illness among 19th century female mill workers, and remains a current problem. Recently, an Ithaca, New York woman was harassed so persistently by a Cornell official that she developed a paralyzed right arm and severe neck pains. After failing to obtain the transfer she applied for on four separate occasions, she was forced to quit. Yet in her case, like that of many other women who need the money to support themselves and their families, this last

* Schneiderman, Rose, with Lucy Goldthwaite. *All For One*. New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1976. p. 86.

** Union WAGE Educational Committee. *Jean Maddox*. Berkeley, Calif.: P.O. Box 452, 1976. p. 8.

"solution" was a disaster. Six months later she was still unemployed."

Sexual harassment has also been used to keep women out of previously all-male jobs. When women first entered office work in the late 19th century, they were met with disapproval. Stories of early women clerical workers implied that a decent girl would risk her honor by taking such a job. A recent article on the feminization of clerical workers quotes a 19th century novel's description of the experience of applying for a job:

I detected an undercurrent of double meaning . . . He perused me up and down with his small pig's eyes, as if he were buying a horse, scrutinizing my face, my figure, my hands, my feet. I felt like a Circassian in an Arab slave market...*

More recently, women working on the Alaska pipeline have met with harassment on their "male" jobs.

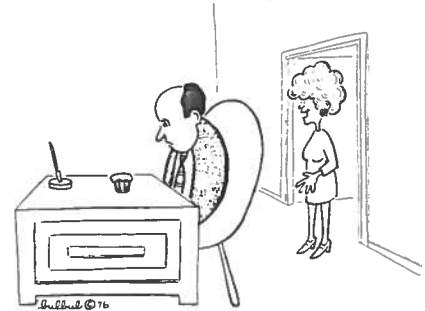
A lot of the foremen resent you, they just see you as a troublemaker, and they don't need any more problems. So they work you to death, give you more than you can possibly do in a day. They try to drive you out, they want to make life so miserable for you that you'll quit.***

Another woman working on the pipeline described co-workers as a problem.

The first 3 weeks on the job, every man I saw tried to gross me out. Dirty stories. Snickers. Propositions. They totally resented me, they totally resent the thought of any woman making as much money as a man.****

It is evident that sexual harassment on the job is not a new problem. Examples of sexual coercion are scattered throughout diaries, letters, and autobiographies of women workers and organizers. It cuts across class, racial and occupational lines. Organizers were aware of it, though it was mainly

seen as a "personal problem" and not a legitimate organizing issue. It has functioned to preserve male/female job ghettos, as a "requirement" for keeping jobs as well as raises, promotions, and benefits. It has been a means for male workers to deal with women whom they see as threats to their masculinity, power, or economic status.



You did say, hire me a cupcake.

*Farley, Lin. "Sexual Harassment." *New York Sunday News*, Aug. 15, 1976. pp. 10-12.

**Davies, Margery. "Women's Place is at the Typewriter: the Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force." *Radical America*, V.8 #4, July-Aug. 1974, p. 13.

***Raymer, Patricia. "Women on the Pipeline: Good Pay in a Man's World." *New York Times*, June 6, 1976. p. 10.

*****Ibid.*

Legal Options

One of the strategies for counteracting sexual harassment at the workplace is to develop sanctions against it—legal procedures to protect women and their jobs, and to penalize those who commit sexual harassment. Unfortunately, legal options are just beginning to be developed.

Legal channels have limitations which must be kept in mind while developing strategies to eliminate sexual harassment. First, legal processes often discriminate by imposing penalties on the basis of race and class. As a result, minority and lower class men are more likely to be accused, convicted and imprisoned than are white, upper and middle class men. Secondly, the kind of penalty imposed through the criminal justice system, is more often destructive than helpful. Finally, legal channels can only be used after sexual harassment has occurred. They will not eliminate the problem itself.

Despite these limitations, there are reasons for developing legal options. They may prevent some men from committing sexual harassment, and may also provide victims with some protection and compensation. Therefore, legal strategies should be developed, along with other strategies more directly aimed at changing attitudes about women and the inequality of power between women and men.

At this point, we cannot recommend any one legal option since none have been adequately tested in court. However, the list below suggests several possibilities which should be evaluated according to local conditions, the needs and desires of the particular victim of sexual harassment, and the details of each case.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 — Title VII

At least two cases of sexual harassment at the workplace (*Corne et al. v. Bausch & Lomb, Inc.*, and *Williams v. Saxbe*) have been brought to Federal District Courts under the Civil Rights Act. (16)

The first case was dismissed on the grounds that 1) the complainant failed to go through other state channels first; 2) the behavior complained of was viewed as a "personal proclivity" and not a discriminatory company policy; and 3) the activity involved was interpreted to be beyond the scope of the Act.

In the second case, the judge found sexual harassment to be within the meaning of the Act, and the defendant was found guilty of discrimination on the basis of sex. Since contradictory precedents have been set, the reliability of this legislation in protecting women from sexual harassment will have to be determined in higher courts.

For several reasons, the use of this legal option is problematic. Although Ms. Williams was eventually reinstated in her job, the other complainants were not. Secondly, going through court takes a great deal of time and energy, not to mention the cost of legal fees, and the loss of working hours. Until clear precedents are set through a test case in higher courts, this option cannot be highly recommended.

State Human Rights Legislation

Beginning in 1976, many complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace were filed with the New York State Division of Human Rights. Under that state's Human Rights Law, sexual harassment has been interpreted as a violation of human rights. The outcome of these cases is not yet known, but processing them seems to have some advantages over other legal channels.

By law, as soon as complaints are filed, complainants are protected from their employers' retaliation. Within 15 days of the filing of a complaint, the Division determines whether there is probable cause. If there is probable cause, the Division attempts conciliation of the parties involved. If no agreement is reached, a date for public hearings must be set (within 60 days of the filing of the complaint). All parties involved may testify and cross-examine witnesses, with or without a lawyer. Within 20 days of the hearing, determinations are made and orders are served. The hearing commissioner may serve cease and desist orders, require that (17)

complainants be reinstated in jobs, and/or compensated for damages. The employer may also be required to take affirmative action, and to provide reports on compliance with the orders.

Because this option provides protection for jobs, and because the process is quicker and less expensive, it appears to be more satisfactory than going through civil and criminal courts. However, New York state may be an exception—that state's Human Rights Law is relatively broad, and its administrative agency is one of the oldest and best developed. New York's legislation should be used as a model for developing similar options in other states.

Occupational Safety and Health Codes

If sexual harassment at the workplace were to be defined as an occupational hazard, the occupational safety and health legislation and administrative agencies could provide another source of protection for victims of sexual harassment. One way of developing this definition would be through use of the concept of "stress." *The Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety* defines stress broadly, including situations which are "Interpreted as a threat to the goals, integrity or well-being of the individual." Sexual harassment clearly falls within this definition.

The evolution of occupational safety and health codes has been slow, however, and is currently focused on physical health hazards rather than on social or psychological dangers of the working environment. Thus, it may be some time before protection from sexual harassment at the workplace is available through occupational safety and health regulations. It is possible that clauses prohibiting sexual harassment could eventually be written into labor contracts, as with other provisions. As more women workers are unionized, this option will become more viable.

Rape Statutes

The serious limitations of using rape statutes as a means of protecting women from sexual harassment are by now well-known. Most rape laws apply only to "forced vaginal penetration," and not to less violent, but equally destructive, forms of

sexual harassment at the workplace. Court procedures are long, emotionally draining, and rarely result in convictions. Furthermore, the racism and classism of the criminal justice system present serious dilemmas in the use of this option.

Unemployment Insurance

If a woman feels compelled to quit her job because she's been sexually harassed at work, unemployment insurance is a possibility. However, it requires a strong case and a willingness to be patient with the procedures. Additionally, to be eligible, one must either have earned money for at least 15 weeks out of the last year or have earned over \$3,240 in two calendar quarters in the previous year.

There are two ways a worker can get benefits, according to Massachusetts law. The first is if a person left "for good cause attributable to the employing unit." The second is if one quit "for compelling personal reasons."

For sexual harassment at the workplace, only the first is applicable. To win benefits a woman must prove that she has tried to change her work situation, either by complaining to her employer—preferably in writing or with witnesses—or by requesting a leave of absence which is later denied.

Clearly, the legal options outlined above point to the necessity of developing specific statutes which protect women from unwanted sexual advances on the job.

Psychological Effects

Understanding the psychological effects of harassment is difficult because many women's reactions are masked or minimized. Women fear being blamed, ostracized or fired, and this prevents open discussion of reactions to sexual harassment. This culture expects women to be nurturing caretakers whose primary job is to please others. Women, at home and at work, are encouraged to think about men's feelings first, and discouraged from recognizing their own. Furthermore, to deny vulnerability, women want to believe that only those who are emotionally unstable will be harassed.

Traditional Freudian psychiatry explains women's reactions to harassment as consistent with the nature of women—passive and masochistic. This explanation fails to address the social variables that affect working women. As previously mentioned, many women cannot financially risk unemployment. When a woman's economic livelihood is threatened, to tolerate harassment may seem the lesser of two evils. A woman worker is often asked to trade her self-respect for monetary compensation. Our society supports the notion that the woman worker should be compliant and do whatever her boss asks because he is paying her salary. In addition, if a woman speaks up, she risks losing social approval. The woman is often blamed: "she asked for it"; "she's lying"; or "she's immoral." Furthermore, there are few viable legal options once she has.

Fear and a negative self-concept are very common responses to sexual harassment. Women fear they will be blamed, publicly shamed, rejected by peers or lose income. Because so few women do speak up, victims of workplace harassment think they are alone, which reinforces feelings of self-blame.

When harassed, a woman's identity as a sexual being takes precedence over her identity as a worker. If she already has traded self-respect for

the job, maintaining it may remain one of her few sources of esteem. Moreover, the loss of self-confidence may begin to have a negative effect on her job performance. The woman then enters a vicious cycle—unable to present herself favorably to a new employer due to low self-esteem, while her present job continues to decrease her self-concept.

Victims of workplace harassment are constantly reminded of their own vulnerability through encountering another's power and aggression. They may feel powerless and helpless, and any conflicts about dependency may be intensified.

Workplace harassment makes many women question their relationship to men in general. They feel betrayed if in the past they saw men as trusted and protecting figures—and now are forced to see them as harassers. Women often become angry—at the particular man, all men, management or the system. Their anger is often minimized by cultural restrictions. Many women also fear overwhelming themselves—and others—with their anger. Anger is often internalized and expressed physically (stomach and headaches or nausea) or by depression. These debilitating situations often disrupt women's lives for years, when expressing anger would be a much healthier response to a destructive situation.

One of the most widespread and destructive reactions is guilt. Women are often accused of complicity. Even those women who understand their own powerlessness in the situation may worry about their unconscious agreement. Focus on the sexual rather than the power dynamic of this harassment may increase a woman's guilt as society tells her she is responsible for controlling sexual matters.

Individuals respond to sexual harassment in a variety of ways—depending on the nature of the harassment, the individual's particular defenses, and the emotional development of the woman. A woman's perception of the number of options she has may affect her reactions. Thus, the socio-economic class of a woman will be a factor. In addition, reactions of significant people in a

woman's life will affect how isolated, helpless, guilty, angry, or frightened she feels. If women keep these feelings to themselves, they remain isolated and powerless. Joining together as women is the way to confront this social problem.



About the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion

AASC was founded in Boston in June, 1976 by three women whose previous work together at a rape crisis center influenced their theoretical and practical orientation. The unique problems of cases in which women were raped by their bosses or co-workers demonstrated the need for an analysis of workplace sexual harassment. These rape victims encountered different legal obstacles and emotional responses than other rape victims. For example, the high status of a government official, who allegedly raped the women who worked for him, prevented his arrest. A new set of emotional and practical issues arose for these victims. Not only were they forced to leave their jobs, but they had no legal recourse. If this was the reality for the victims of forcible rape, how many women must suffer more subtle—yet still traumatic—abuse at work? Sexual harassment at the workplace seemed to be a special situation—one that fell outside the scope of services offered by existing women's groups. Rape crisis centers and working women's organizations alike were performing crucial functions, yet were not directly meeting the needs of women harassed on the job. Both types of groups, however, provided the necessary background for sexual harassment at work to emerge as an issue. Rape crisis centers redefined rape as an act of violence, (23)



refuted myths about women's sexuality, and pointed to aspects of women's socialization which keep women silent victims. Working women's organizations revealed women's low pay and low labor force status, and the numbers of women and families dependent on women's income.

Changes in attitudes and conditions fostered by such women's movement groups exposed new binds and a deeper level of contradictory roles for women in the U.S. workforce. As the surface was scratched, more complex layers were uncovered. If our society appears to be growing more tolerant of economically independent women—and women who live alone—the reality of violence inhibits more women from acting independently. While a few women are now allowed to assume high status positions, “protected” by laws against job discrimination, they are still subject to sexual harassment. This complex reality—more and more women need to work, society has accepted some measures to minimize educational and job discrimination, and women currently have some support for revealing their victimization—makes investigating sexual harassment on the job logical and timely.

AASC is a feminist group with the ultimate goal of eliminating sexual harassment at the workplace. The group's commitment is both to individuals trapped in abusive situations and to groups working towards a more profound transformation of society. With this in mind, strategies are measured in terms of immediate effectiveness and long-range implications. Sexual harassment at the workplace must be linked with other conditions affecting women, particularly violence against women and economic issues. A basic assumption of the group is that the failure of our social system to respond to women's needs is rooted in unequal distribution of power and resources inherent to this social structure.

AASC's activities have included:

- Outreach to local women's and community groups, and to agencies that offer services to women workers

- National survey of workplace harassment reported to rape crisis centers and women office workers' groups
- Direct service to women workers, including:
 - legal options & referrals
 - unemployment compensation referrals for women who quit their jobs
 - emotional support
 - vocational & educational counseling referrals

AASC's plans for the future include:

- Expansion of services to women experiencing harassment
- Workplace educational programs
- Community educational programs
- Outreach to unions
- Outreach to local, state and federal policy-making agencies that affect working conditions
- Assisting other communities to develop services to victims of workplace harassment.



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