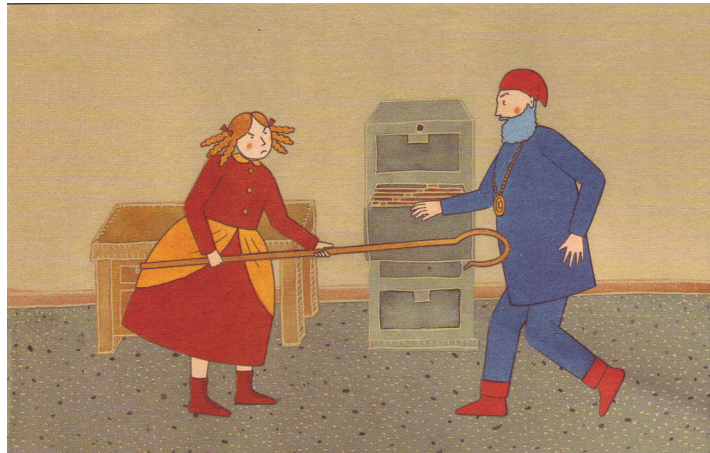


No Offense

Harassment In The Workplace



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Credits

The Video

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Leeds Animation Workshop

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This Teaching Guide

Compilation: Amy Roussel

Copy Editor: Jennifer Smith

Leaf Learning Catalog and ISBN Numbers

DVD LW-7114-96-DVD ISBN 1-55740-480-1

Closed Captioning

This program is closed-captioned.

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Summary

There are many forms of harassment that can take place in the workplace. For many years, people have struggled to be treated equally—and, on the whole, many countries have been progressive about equal treatment for all. The workplace, however, is a much smaller arena that may have very few repercussions for those who don't act appropriately. In an organization with little established policy, harassment could take place consistently with no change whatsoever. In a progressive organization with established policy, harassment may occur, but it is dealt with immediately in an appropriate manner. In which organization would you rather work?

This video demonstrates how harassment in the workplace can and does occur. Even small, seemingly innocuous comments like 'flower' or 'sweetie' are also inappropriate—a form of harassment. As Queen Ella works through her own Department she discovers many things that are wrong, and in the end strives to enact change that will set things right again. Harassment in the workplace can take many forms, as this video demonstrates by following Queen Ella through a problem she didn't even know existed.

Key points:

- Sexual harassment has many definitions – harassment can be considered as any offensive conduct of a sexual nature at work that is unwanted and/or unreciprocated.
- There are many different forms of harassment, including; sexual, racial, homosexual, or harassment of individuals with disabilities.
- Harassment in the workplace has many negative effects for the recipient, colleagues, and the organization as a whole.
- Many problems associated with harassment are seen commonly in the workplace, such as; intimidation, exclusion, denying the problem, and blaming the victim—to name only a few. Harassment should never be considered 'commonplace' or as a 'normal human trait'.
- Organizations can take several steps to address and avoid harassment, such as; reporting incidents, keeping a record of what happens, and backing up the policy with education.
- Many myths surround harassment in the workplace—these myths have to be addressed and acknowledged as falsehoods.

Harassment at Work

Harassment is any conduct related to age, creed, disability, nationality, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic, which is unwanted by the recipient. It does not matter whether the harassment was unintentional, it is the effect of the behavior that is important.

[Labor Research Department: "Tackling Harassment at Work"]

Sexual harassment is conduct which is imposed on another person because of his/her sex. It is unwanted, unreciprocated and regarded as offensive by the recipient.

[Trades Union Congress: "Sexual Harassment at Work"]

Conduct of a sexual nature, or other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of women and men at work, is unacceptable if such conduct: is unwanted, unreasonable and offensive to the recipient; affects that person's access to training, continued employment, promotion, salary or any other employment decisions; and/or; creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating work environment for the recipient. This can include unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct.

[European Commission: "Protecting the Dignity of Women and Men at Work"]

Sexual harassment is unsolicited and unreciprocated behavior (sometimes of a sexual nature) towards people in less powerful positions or circumstances. In our society, sexual harassment is often confused with what is considered natural behavior, and as such is regarded as normal and unremarkable by many people. Sexual harassment is an expression of power and is generally not motivated by sexual desire.

[Carrie Herbert: "Sexual Harassment in Schools: a Guide for Teachers"]

Any of the following may trigger harassment at work:

- gender
- race, ethnic origin, or nationality
- sexual orientation
- age
- recent employment or promotion
- religious or political convictions
- willingness to challenge harassment, leading to victimization
- membership (or non-membership) of a trade union
- disabilities
- real or suspected AIDS/HIV status

The Forms of Harassment

Sexual harassment does not involve mutual flirting, genuine affection, or friendly reciprocated repartee. However, it may include:

- Inappropriate use of such terms as 'sweetheart', 'love', 'rose petal', etc.
- Unwanted comments on dress or appearance
- Name-calling or sexist jokes
- Leering, winking, gesturing, whistling, or grunting
- Displaying pin-ups or sexually explicit material
- Persistent requests for dates or sexual favors
- Invasive questions
- Obscene phone calls, nuisance letters, threats
- Touching, patting, grabbing, molestation, or indecent exposure
- Indecent assault, rape, or physical attack

Racial harassment may include:

- Comments or questions which emphasize color, race, or ethnic origin over a person's role as a worker
- Unfair work allocation
- Refusing to work with, or deliberately isolating co-workers
- Displaying racially offensive, or religiously offensive, materials
- Name-calling, mimicking accents
- Racially offensive remarks or 'jokes'
- Personal abuse, threats, or physical attacks

Harassment of homosexual individuals may include:

- The assumption that everyone is heterosexual
- Unwelcome comments, stereotypical impressions, or 'jokes'
- Gossip, aggressive or intrusive questions about private life
- Assuming that all homosexual individuals are HIV positive
- Ignoring, excluding, isolating, or avoiding a colleague
- Unnecessary touching or making attempts to 'convert' homosexual individuals
- Attempts to get them dismissed or transferred
- Intimidation, abuse, or physical attack

Harassment of disabled individuals may include:

- Offensive language, name-calling, 'jokes', or mockery
- Assuming that physical disability equals mental disability
- Speaking to colleagues rather than the person with a disability
- Assuming that people with disabilities don't have a social or private life
- Asking intimate questions about a person's disability
- Unwelcome interference or uninvited touching
- Patting on the head, or physical abuse or intimidation

The Effects Of Harassment

For the Recipient

Harassment can severely affect a recipient's physical and mental health, professional and person life, and current and future career. Stress-related problems may include:

- Susceptibility to colds and other illnesses
- Acne
- Headaches, backache
- Digestive problems or eating disorders
- Sleep disturbances
- Dependence on alcohol or other drugs
- Anxiety, depression
- Isolation
- Inability to concentrate
- Overwhelming negative feelings, such as; anger, fear, guilt, shame, humiliation
- Damage to relationships with family and friends
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Lack of trust in others

There is likely to be absenteeism, diminished quality of work, and ultimately job loss through dismissal for poor performance or resignation because the job has become unbearable.

For Colleagues

Indirectly, employees who witness harassment aimed at others in their workplace may experience stress, loss of morale, and low productivity.

For Organizations

Employers have a legal responsibility to provide a work environment free of discrimination, and may be found liable in cases of harassment. They may have to award financial compensation for:

- Loss of earnings
- Medical treatment, including psychotherapy
- Injury to feelings
- Legal costs

Organizations should also think seriously about the cumulative costs of:

- Replacing staff affected
- Paying sick leave to employees who miss work because of stress
- Reduced individual and group productivity
- The business cost of losing public goodwill after adverse publicity

Common Problems

Concealment and silence

The workers insisted they had no special problems.

Minorities at work are more likely to experience harassment

Bluebeard had appointed a high proportion of his fellow gnomes – particularly male gnomes – to positions in the department.

Intimidation

The “strange atmosphere” in the canteen is the result of the pin-ups and discriminatory material on display, together with wolf-whistling, gesticulating, shouts of “new girl!”, and muttered innuendo.

Exclusion and isolation

We don’t want to sit next to a bloody fairy.

Inappropriate and patronizing language

What is it, flower?

Blaming the victim

*That’s your fault for being so pretty!
What do you expect, dressed like that?
It was just an excuse – she wasn’t up to the job.*

Denying the problem

Nobody else has complained.

Quid pro quo

I’ll take you off dishwashing and make you a supervisor.

Resentment of colleagues

The other staff call her “boss’ pet”.

Many women experience racism and sexism combined

Curlylocks, blamed for the chef’s attentions to her, is jostled and insulted by her co-workers.

Personal remarks

*More attractive than the last temp we had!
Sweet, like you.*

Harassment from members of the public

The tenant, a Mr. Troll, suffered from mood swings.

Common Problems *cont.*

Pervasive sexism

*Girls in this office are expected to look feminine.
If you don't mind, I think we are all ready for a cuppa.*

Different perceptions of what is offensive

"Oh, Redneck, you are a tonic!" laughed Nelly. But the queen was not amused.

Anti-gay prejudice

You can't trust fairies - and they're a health risk.

Undermining and undervaluing a colleague's work

I had to tell her she was useless.

Harassment and bullying used to maintain power

You may be the queen, but you are still a woman. I'm going to shut you up like all the other trouble-makers.

What Can Be Done?

It should be emphasized that a distinguishing characteristic of sexual harassment is that employees subjected to it often will be reluctant to complain. An absence of complaints, therefore, does not necessarily mean an absence of sexual harassment. It may mean that the recipients think that there is no point in complaining because nothing will be done about it, or because it will be trivialized or the complainant subjected to ridicule, or because they fear reprisals.

[European Commission: "How to Combat Sexual Harassment at Work"]

"No Offense" offers the following examples of good practice:

Monitoring performance

In the Department of Dwellings and Abodes, productivity was going down, and staff absences were going up...

Taking responsibility for providing a discrimination-free work environment

The queen summoned the department's Chief Executive. "I have no idea where they can be" he told her. So she decided to find out for herself.

Reporting incidents

*Ella approached the chef. "I'd like a word with you."
She complained to her line manager, Iron John.*

Seeking confidential advice

The cleaning supervisor was a wise woman. Ella asked her about the strange disappearances.

Keeping a record of what happens

The queen made a brief progress report...

Involving the workforce in drawing up a harassment policy and procedures

With the help of staff and union representatives, these were quickly worked out and disseminated.

Protecting staff who deal with the public

A safety policy was drawn up in memory of Dame Trot.

What Can Be Done? *cont.*

Backing up the policy with education

The entire staff was sent for training.

You must of course undergo intensive disenchantment...

Letting top management be seen to back the policy

The queen herself takes down offensive notices and replaces them with positive, anti-harassment ones.

Confronting known perpetrators of harassment

This constant observation is distracting me from my work.

The queen turned to Bluebeard. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

Moving the harasser (not the recipient) to a different job

You will then be transferred into the form of a frog, until you can find a princess willing to interview you for an executive post.

Myths and Misconceptions

It is a part of human nature

On the contrary, harassment is a learned social behavior, acquired within the context of a society which discriminates against certain types of people.

It can be a sign of sexual attraction

It is true that many people meet their future partner at work, but these relationships do not begin with unwanted pats, touches, innuendos, displays of an offensive nature, etc.

It was a compliment

Not all compliments constitute sexual harassment. However, comments about personal appearance are not usually appropriate at work. In a 1992 study, it was found that “women received more compliments than men. Men tended to be complimented by someone older or a superior (for example a boss complimenting an employee on his work), but women could be complimented by anyone (and many compliments concerned their appearance). An example is the male professor who interrupted a female professor’s class to whisper loudly: ‘Can I whisper in your ear? I didn’t have a chance to tell you this morning how lovely you look.’

“Compliments, terms of endearment, and comments on appearance may be intended to be pleasant, but they also serve as a reminder that a woman’s appearance is there to be commented upon and that the person giving the compliment is in a position to pass judgment.” [Joan Swann, “Girls, Boys, and Language”]

Sexual harassment? I wish I could get some!

This is an attempt to trivialize the issue, or a sign that the person making the statement has not understood the difference between ‘harassment’ and ‘attention’. Whereas sexual attention can be fun, harassment is a form of bullying.

A male, white, heterosexual, able-bodied person is as likely to be harassed as anyone else

It is very rare for men to experience sexual harassment from women. In the cases where it has happened, the man has almost invariably been young (18-23), and working alone with a group of women, typically as a student doing a summer holiday job. The ability to harass another person comes from the power you hold over them: as an individual, through your position in an organization, or through your position in society. Most organizations, and society as a whole, tend to reinforce the power of men (particularly the white, the heterosexual, and the able-bodied). Therefore, unwelcome heterosexual attention for a man—while it may be upsetting—has very different implications and may not be the devastating problem it can be for a woman.

Questions For Discussion

1. Have you ever been affected by harassment in the workplace, or know someone who has? As a group, discuss each experience and how it made you feel/or how the person you know felt. Discuss how the harasser could have said something different/done something differently at the time to avoid the harassment.
2. Consider the following excerpt from the video:

At first all went well, but soon one section of the workforce began to lag behind the others. In the Department of Dwellings and Abodes, productivity was going down; staff absences were going up; and, though the workers insisted they had no special problems, it was rumored that bad luck befell anyone who went to work there.

Identify the components in this statement that describe an unhappy work environment. What other problems may be seen in a workplace where harassment is taking place? What types of harassment did the disguised Queen Ella have to cope with?

3. Once Queen Ella had discovered Bluebeard to be a big part of the problem...

"That's the kind of gnome I am!" he shrugged. "As for you - you may be the Queen, but you are still a woman. I'm going to shut you up like all the other troublemakers."

With this sort of attitude, things obviously have to change...

As a group, discuss what kind of policies could be implemented to avoid the harassment apparent under Bluebeard's supervision. Is there any way that Queen Ella could have discovered Bluebeard's negativity prior to his appointment as supervisor? As a group, put together a set of five indirect 'interview questions' that may help to discern a person who may discriminate—it may be more difficult than you would think!

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Multiple Choice Worksheet

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

- 1) Which Chief Executive did Queen Ella speak with?
 - a) the Head Dwarf
 - b) Bluebeard
 - c) Grumpy
 - d) Thor
- 2) How did Queen Ella disguise herself?
 - a) as a nurse
 - b) as a gnome
 - c) as a serving maid
 - d) as a teacher
- 3) Which staffing agency did the disguised Queen Ella say she was with?
 - a) Maids R Us
 - b) The Tidy People
 - c) Gnome Services
 - d) Maid in a Moment
- 4) What did the gnomes in the canteen call the disguised Queen Ella?
 - a) a bloody fairy
 - b) a nice lady
 - c) a nitwit
 - d) boss
- 5) Which employee had 'wandering hands'?
 - a) the dishwasher
 - b) the chef
 - c) the server
 - d) the maid
- 6) Who usually performed the disguised Queen Ella's job of collecting rents?
 - a) Dame Trot
 - b) Dame Lizzy
 - c) Lady Sue
 - d) Lady Dame
- 7) Which tenant treated the disguised Queen Ella poorly?
 - a) Ms. Witch
 - b) Mr. Dwarf
 - c) Mr. Gnome
 - d) Mr. Troll
- 8) Who did the disguised Queen Ella fill in for at Bluebeard's office?
 - a) the Witch
 - b) Red Riding Hood
 - c) Bo-Peep
 - d) the fairy
- 9) Which record of Bluebeard's was the disguised Queen Ella forbidden to look at?
 - a) the Payroll Records
 - b) the Personnel Records
 - c) the Supervisor Records
 - d) the Dismissal Records
- 10) What form was Bluebeard to become after intensive disenchantment and re-education?
 - a) a lizard
 - b) a cat
 - c) a frog
 - d) a salamander

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Multiple Choice Worksheet *Answer Key*

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

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Publications

How to Combat Sexual Harassment at Work – a guide to implementing the European Commission Code of Practice Commission of the European Communities, 1993.

Tackling Harassment at Work Labour Research Department, London, 1994.

TUC Guide to Tackling Race Discrimination at Work Trades Union Congress (TUC), London, 1995.

Sexual Harassment of Women in the Workplace – a guide to legal action Women Against Sexual Harassment (WASH), London, 1990.

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Doyle, Brian. **Disability, Discrimination and Equal Opportunities, a comparative study of the employment rights of disabled persons** Mansell, 1995.

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Herbert, Carrie. **Sexual Harassment in Schools: A Guide for Teachers** David Fulton, 1992.

Palmer, Anya. **Less Equal Than Others – a survey of lesbians and gay men at work** Stonewall, 1994.

For More Information...

1. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination – Questions and Answers
<http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html>
2. EEOC - Equal Pay and Compensation Discrimination
<http://www.eeoc.gov/types/epa.html>
3. International Information Programs – Women's Rights in the U.S.
<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display>
4. Teachers Against Prejudice
<http://www.teachersagainstprejudice.org/>
5. YWCA – discrimination at work
<http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djlSl6PIKpG&b=297537>
6. Workplace fairness – your rights and other resources
<http://www.workplacefairness.org/news>
7. Legal definitions – Workplace Discrimination
<http://www.legal-definitions.com/employment-law/workplace-discrimination/>
8. Equal Rights Advocates – Know your rights—sexual discrimination
<http://www.equalrights.org/publications/kyr/sexdiscrim.asp>
9. Information on Sexual Harassment
<http://www.de2.psu.edu/harassment/generalinfo/>
10. The Site.org – Discrimination at Work
<http://www.thesite.org/workandstudy/working/workersrights/discriminationatwork>
11. Management Issues – Workplace discrimination a 'global problem'
<http://www.management-issues.com/2006/8/24/research/workplace-discrimination-a-global-problem.asp>
12. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health – Women's Safety and Health Issues at Work
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/women/>