



#METOO IN TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED OCCUPATIONS PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Women comprise less than 1-3% of workers in occupations such as electrician, machinist, transit vehicle mechanic, or welder. These statistics mean that women can often find themselves the only woman on a job, or the first woman their male coworkers have ever worked alongside, or in a work environment that has a “locker room” atmosphere. When women are still less than 3% of the workforce they often are both workers and simultaneously pioneers, who may spend just as much energy on doing their job as on breaking through stereotypes about women’s capabilities and gendered work norms. Women working in traditionally male-dominated occupations experience some of the highest rates of sexual harassment, and continue to face persistent and pervasive discrimination and gender bias on the job. Maintaining workplaces, apprenticeship training, and union activities free from harassment, intimidation, and retaliation is critical to ensuring that workers who are traditionally under-represented in an industry sector or occupation have a safe and respectful workplace. It is also critical for industries that want to have an inclusive and diverse workforce to understand the distinct challenges facing workers that are marginalized.

How Does Sexual Harassment Differ for Women in Male-Dominated Workplaces

Women working in male-dominated, blue collar occupations face a range of issues that are distinct from those that women face in occupations with either more gender balance, female dominance, or where the norms and culture of a white-collar workplace prevail, especially in regards to sexual harassment. Here are some key factors to consider when looking to address sexual harassment in relation to women in nontraditional jobs:

- 1) A workplace where women find themselves isolated, the only representative of their gender, can also be one where women are made to feel unwelcome. Less egregious forms of harassment are amplified when a worker is marginalized.
- 2) The workplace is often “the locker room”, and a “macho culture” may be the norm for the work environment.
- 3) Women working in nontraditional jobs challenge stereotypes of women’s place, capacity and work, both making them more likely to be targets and less likely to report.
- 4) Dangerous and physically demanding working conditions make sexual harassment a safety & health issue – as a result of the distraction and stress brought on by sexual harassment or because of threats, being put in harm’s way or actual violence.
- 5) In the fluid construction employment world, where layoffs and changing worksites and employers is the norm, retaliation for complaining of sexual harassment may be covered up.
- 6) Unlike many salaried jobs, construction workers usually have no paid sick days, any time off is looked at as unfavorable to tradeswomen’s image as a good worker.
- 7) Regularly changing workplaces, employers and co-workers adds challenges to addressing and redressing sexual harassment.
- 8) If tradeswomen seek redress, they are put on a “do-not-hire” list, seen as a trouble-maker.
- 9) Micro-inequities, that in other workplaces might be understood and treated as pattern & practice of a hostile workplace, are hard to establish because of fluid employment situations.

Women in male-dominated occupations often enter a workplace where the "locker room environment", or macho culture is the unquestioned standard of behavior, communication and practices. This means an environment where sexualized conversations, jokes, stories, graffiti, and pornography are commonplace. Even equipment, tools and parts can be referred to in sexual terms. There is enormous pressure to fit in and join in – to be “one of the guys” and to counter the stereotype and pre-conceived notions that women are just not cut out for the type of work in a construction or manufacturing setting. Women entering these fields are striving for acceptance and inclusion in the male camaraderie and don’t want to be seen as whiners or complainers.

It is especially hard for women, who find the “locker room” culture either hostile, unwelcoming, uncomfortable or inappropriate for a workplace, to ask for it to change. To do so risks being told they are “just too sensitive”, or “we should not have to change the way we work just because a woman is here”. To challenge workplace culture on an individual basis is risky: to speak up, to complain, and to call attention is fraught with all the stigma or stereotypes of being female in a male-identified job: “if you cannot take the heat get out of the fire”, or “women are whiners who don’t belong in a dangerous and dirty job” and, “if you don’t want to tolerate the working conditions, then don’t work in this field”. Women who enter these fields may feel that they have no choice but to adapt to the locker room environment and not be labeled a “troublemaker”.

Working as the only female on a job site, being ostracized by co-workers, or facing harassment can add a layer of stress and distraction to a job with dangerous and hazardous conditions. Because the work is physically demanding and dangerous, harassment, discriminatory practices, and isolation do not just jeopardize employment opportunities and livelihood, but can in fact sometimes be life threatening. Tradeswomen have faced threats of physical harm, sabotaged work, and being placed in dangerous situations by male co-workers and supervisors. In a hostile workplace, supervisors or co-workers may withhold training, assistance, and safety information or equipment. Tradeswomen report they often feel that they cannot ask for help because that would start the scenario of "See, I told you she couldn't do it." Women in male-dominated workplaces may also be more reluctant to report workplace safety and health problems because they fear they be may tagged as complainers and risk straining further their workplace relationships and jeopardizing their employment situation.

Harassment may manifest as hazing and many tradeswomen report that their physical strength is often "tested" by their male co-workers, asked to lift or carry materials that normally two people would do. Tradeswomen say they often overcompensate in their work to "prove" themselves to their co-workers and bosses. Proving yourself in a male-dominated culture may result in women reluctant to ask for help or for safety equipment. A woman may risk performing unsafe work without this equipment to prove to her male co-workers that she can and will do unsafe things to be seen as “one of the guys” and not someone who expects preferential treatment. Many new male apprentices experience a period of hazing at first, but for women the poor treatment can persist and it is intended not to "test," but to drive the women away. It is often complicated by the fact that in some nontraditional occupations jobsites and co-workers regularly change, so the hazing can be an ongoing part of a tradeswoman’s work life.

The acute as well as chronic stress reactions brought on by a hostile workplace can leave a worker distracted, unable to focus, or not take proper safety precautions, resulting in on-the-job injuries. And while in some jobs, workers can take paid sick time to deal with the effects of stress, construction workers do not necessarily have those workplace protections and will lose not just the pay for any time

off, but potentially a job or a future assignment. Since layoffs are common in the construction industry, a layoff might be used as a reason to retaliate against someone who complains of sexual harassment.

Moreover, most construction jobs are not permanent, and women may withhold complaining or reporting out of a fear of a lack of job security, not just on the current job, but for future employment opportunities. And leaving a job to avoid a harasser doesn't provide any guarantee that the same employee won't show up on the next job. In an industry like construction, with multiple employers on a jobsite, finding redress may be more complicated than seeking relief or complaining to the leadership of your own company, apprenticeship program or union.

Solutions: Recommendations for Industry and Public Policy to Ensure Harassment-Free Workplaces For Women in Male-Dominated Jobs

There must be a collaborative approach between both private and public policy in defining transformative strategies and solutions to create equitable and inclusive workplaces that ensure that all workers, especially the most vulnerable workers have jobs that are safe, respectful and harassment free. To achieve this goal for all workers, public policy and industry stakeholders should have clear harassment prevention policies in place, provide comprehensive anti-harassment training that includes bystander intervention, and establish clear complaint, investigation and disciplinary processes. Language to address sexual harassment should be clarified and expanded to state:

“sexual harassment” means any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors, other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or any other conduct that has the purpose or effect of interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment because of the individual’s actual or perceived sex.

The approach to preventing and ending sexual harassment should be similar to efforts to create a safety culture in the workplace.

Public policymakers can address sexual harassment by:

- Requiring that policies as described above be mandated in any federal, state or local funding agreements, grant awards or contractual provisions. This should include contracts for job training programs, public investments in infrastructure or contract awards to companies.
- Requiring that policies as described above be required for businesses seeking permits, licensing or to be on preferred or pre-qualified contractor lists
- Expanding resources for human rights, labor protection, and health and safety agencies to broaden their scope to include public anti-harassment awareness campaigns, public education, and increased capacity to respond to complaints in a timely manner and to maintain a public registry of violations.
- Providing resources for a public help-line to offer support, resources and linkages for targets and victims of harassment to confidentially discuss options to address and redress sexual harassment in their workplace or training facility
- Addressing sexual harassment as a health and safety hazard and requiring OSHA and state OSHA's to address this in their monitoring of workplaces and reporting violations.
- Promoting campaigns such as the “Be That One Guy” campaign of the Ironworkers international union and encourage other industry stakeholders to adopt similar efforts.

Industry Stakeholders – Employers, Contractors, Unions and Apprenticeship Programs

Leadership must create organizational policy and guidance on ensuring respectful, inclusive and equitable appropriate behavior. Policy should be concisely written, regularly and widely communicated and modeled at all levels of leadership. Policy on sexual harassment should be reflected in relevant contractual agreements, union constitution and by-laws, apprenticeship guidelines. It should govern practices in off-site work or union related activities. It should include provisions for:

- Addressing harassment as prohibited conduct and describing steps to prevent, address, and redress.
- Conducting comprehensive, in-person, interactive training, customized for all levels of supervisory and non-supervisory workers, as well as instructors, union leaders and representatives, on how to prevent sexual harassment, how to respond if it occurs and what to do as a bystander to intervene.
- Complaint and grievance procedures that identify who to report to, clearly explain how complaints will be handled and provide safety and job security for complainants regardless of who the perpetrator is.
- Outlining investigation practices and designating a neutral party investigator and clear remedies and disciplinary steps.
- Periodic assessments and regular monitoring of the work/training environment for issues of sexual harassment.

Industry best practices can be found in newly adopted policies, trainings and campaigns within the Ironworkers International union. These include:

- Implementing dedicated townhall meetings designed to break the silence and provide an open forum for frank discussion for employers and employees to realize the gravity and urgency of the issue. The goal of the forums are to identify solutions and ways to implement them.
- Establishing a system in place to report incidences, encourage reporting without facing retaliation, and maintaining anonymity.
- Creation of a curriculum & diversity training for membership that goes beyond the typical “sexual harassment” training.
- Conducting bystander training that emphasizes harassment as a safety issue and incorporating it into mandatory safety training and Ironworker Safety Director Training Course.
- Advancing the new “*Be That One Guy*” campaign designed to challenge sexism and to address and curtail workplace bullying, hazing, sexual harassment and discrimination and remove barriers to advancement.

The National Center for Women’s Equity in Apprenticeship and Employment at Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) provides guidance, training and practical support for how to increase the number of women entering and being retained in male-dominated occupations in the construction, manufacturing and transportation sector. This includes Sexual Harassment Prevention training and policy support for registered apprenticeship programs, employers, unions and other industry stakeholders. These resources and trainings can be customized to serve distinct categories of workers and supervisory personnel. **Resources to address sexual harassment can be found** at www.womensequitycenter.org

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