

# A WOMAN'S PLACE

## Sexual Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace

By

Barbara Hollander  
Central New Jersey Branch President

**Description:** This script consists of a series of vignettes meant to trigger discussion about the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. Questions for discussion are included at the end.

CAST: Note that many of the parts may be doubled.

Vignette I	:	2 women, receptionist
Vignette II	:	2 women
Vignette III	:	2 women
Vignette IV	:	2 men
Vignette V	:	1 man, 1 woman

### Introduction

As society has been changing, more and more women are becoming the source of income for a growing proportion of families in the United States. In addition the high rate of divorce has affected significantly the economic status of many women.

More women are now remaining single than ever before. Without the economic support of a man, these women must work outside the home. They have no other source of income. Women who are married are finding that they have to share the financial burden as equal partners in two-income families.

Despite today's many laws and court decisions, women are still subject to widespread discrimination in the labor force. Employed women are still concentrated in the lowest paying, least valued jobs. They will suffer inequitable treatment in social security, pension and insurance benefits. They are still affected by unfair practices and regulations in education. And, they are still victims of sexual harassment.

A leading magazine questioned nine thousand clerical and professional women nationwide about sexual harassment at work. Ninety-two percent said they had been subjected to unpleasant and annoying behavior by male workers.

A study of New York working women found that 70% had experienced sexual harassment. The vast majority of the cases, however, had not been reported. 5% believed nothing would be done. 42% thought they would be ridiculed. And, 30% were afraid **they** would be blamed and suffer as a result.

This evening, we will present 5 vignettes, of situations common enough in offices around the country. Perhaps they happened to you, or to someone you know. When they all have been presented, we'll discuss them and their implications for all of us.

### Vignette I

SETTING: An office. Vignette I takes place in the reception room. The balance of the script takes place around the water cooler.

TIME: 10 minutes + discussion

SETTING: an employment agency

(A WOMAN WALKS IN – A LITTLE OUT OF BREATH: GIVES NAME TO RECEPTIONIST. RECOGNIZES SALLY WAITING. SITS DOWN NEXT TO HER AND SPEAKS.)

SALLY: Betsy – hi! You're job hunting too? What happened? I thought you were working at Marshall & Brown.

BETSY: Oh, I had to leave – my boss was always hitting on me. It got so I just couldn't face working there another day. And, besides, I know that if I didn't go out with him, I would never get anywhere in that company. So I just left.

SALLY: You mean you were being sexually harassed? That happened to a friend of mine. I told her to report it, but she was just too embarrassed by the whole thing. She just left, too.

BETSY: Well, in my case I had no real proof. I was just afraid that they would say I was to blame and my reputation would suffer.  
I'm a single parent – I have to consider my child. I didn't want any ugly gossip.

SALLY: You know, it's hard enough asking it without all this nonsense. I read in a magazine the other day that there was a nationwide survey done among clerical and professional women and 92% of those interviewed said they suffered some form of sexual harassment at work.

BETSY: I'm not surprised. More and more women have to work these days, so more women are going to encounter this.

SALLY: So what's the answer?

RECEPTIONIST: Mrs. Steinfeld...

BETSY: (STANDS UP) – wish me luck – I really need this job! I have a family to support.

(BLACKOUT) (THE REST OF THE ACTION CENTERS AROUND A COFFEE STATION.)

### **Vignette II.**

SUSAN: It happened again! Here I am, a college graduate – assistant financial director, and just now a visiting auditor said to Sam, my assistant – “Ask your girl to get me a cup of coffee – and some cigarettes. I'm out of them”. I hope he chokes on those cigarettes! Why are women expected to get the coffee and to clean the coffee pot? It seems that anything to do with food and drink automatically becomes the woman's domain. I bet that if we ever have a woman President, the nation will expect her to take personal responsibility for keeping the White House clean!

FRAN: That's nothing. Last week I was sick. I was home with a virus – I mean I really felt horrible, and when I came back to the office, this fellow who's a senior executive, twenty five or thirty years older than I am, said to me – “We missed you yesterday. What was the matter – female plumbing?” Well, who asked for that? It was a vulgar and ugly thing to say. I felt like really giving it to him. But then – I would just get more upset and then I would be labeled a

hysterical female. But at that moment I felt so hurt and demeaned. Why do men say such hurtful things to women?

SUSAN: I wish I knew. I heard comments about, quote, “female problems”, too. Women never talk to men that way. I hate to harp on this, but something else happened to me about this – “me-man; you-servant” bit. We all chipped in for a party (this fellow was leaving for another job) and all the men sat around waiting for the women to serve them. We are all supposed to be equal – what a joke!

FRAN: Why does it have to be us against them? Why?

(BLACKOUT)

### **Vignette III**

BETTY: I finally got my nerve up and spoke to my supervisor about a pay increase. I told him that Joe Evans, in the next office, who does the same work I do, gets almost double my salary. And, do you know what he said to me? He said that’s because Joe has to support a family!

JOAN: Does he know it’s illegal to give unequal pay for equal work?

BETTY: Sure he does. But, because the titles are different, he thinks he can dodge the issue.

JOAN: You know, you’re right. Have you ever noticed: in a restaurant, the man greeting you is a maitre d’: in another restaurant, the woman is a hostess, and you can be sure she’s making less money.

BETTY: Uh-huh. In the office, the man is an administrative assistant; a woman doing the same work is a secretary.

JOAN: In a hotel, the man is a porter, the woman is a chambermaid. And in a hospital, a man is an orderly, a woman is a nurse’s aid.

BETTY: And in almost every one of these cases (and there are many examples), the man's title carries with it a higher pay scale than the woman's. Of course – if the work is essentially the same, the practice is illegal.

JOAN: I read somewhere that it takes a woman nine days to earn what a man earns in five.

BETTY: Isn't there anything we can do?

(BLACKOUT)

**Vignette IV.**

JEFF: Did you hire a secretary yet?

TED: No, not yet. Although I have two good possibilities.

JEFF: Oh, tell me about them.

TED: Well, they are both well qualified, they both seem to be self-starters, and their personalities seem compatible to mine.

JEFF: Sounds great. Which one will get the job?

TED: Well, the problem is one is a 20 year old – very attractive – and the other is 53 years old, a widow.

JEFF: That's no problem. Give me a young good looking chick any time! It makes me feel good to have someone sexy around! Why would you even consider hiring a 53 year old woman?

TED: Because an older woman won't ask for maternity leave. And as you know, it's illegal to force her to leave because she is pregnant. And you can't take away any seniority or pension credits for that matter, either.

JEFF: Look – forget about the young woman's looks for a minute. She will have far more years to give to the company –

TED: If she doesn't leave to get married.

JEFF: Nowadays most women work after marriage.

TED: I think an older woman would be more grateful for the job, and therefore more dedicated. And besides, these young women are just looking to go up another rung on the corporate ladder.

JEFF: It would be more fun taking the younger one to a convention. With the other one, I'd feel as if I'm going with my mother.

TED: As a matter of fact, talking about mothers, Jeff – the 53 year old is your mother. Which one should I hire now?

(BLACKOUT)

**Vignette V.**

JANE: Mr. Jones I want to tell you about a situation that is not getting better. In fact, I find it more and more difficult to concentrate on my work.

MR. JONES: Go on Jane, what's the problem.

JANE: I enjoy being as accountant in this firm. Most of the men are very nice to work with. However, there are two consultants who are constantly annoying me. Every time I have to walk by their desks, they make some comment about my clothes, my hairstyle or my walk. Yesterday, Jerry blocked my way and brushed up against me. He said, "Jane, honey, if I told you that you had a nice body, would you hold it against me?" I told him very firmly that his behavior was not appreciated. He just smiled and said – "Oh come on, you know you love it."

MR. JONES: Jane, don't you think you are being sensitive? You shouldn't let this bother you. In a way – OK, maybe not a very mature way – those men are complimenting you.

JANE: I don't feel complimented. I feel degraded. If someone is not encouraged in any way, then he should stop the suggestive looks and the comments. Mr. Jones, this is causing me a lot of stress. Do you know that since this started, I have developed an ulcer? And even though none of this is my fault, I feel guilty and depressed. These two men are constantly humiliating me. And I'm

not the only one, either. Other women have mentioned getting these looks, or pats, or being the subject of dirty jokes. One even told me that she was being pressured to provide sexual favors if she wanted a promotion. Mr. Jones, what are you going to do about it?

(BLACKOUT)

### **SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. You may want to begin by asking any men in the audience to react to what has been presented.
2. Is there a difference between “harassment” and “discrimination”?
3. Are the men in these vignettes all villains? For example, in #III, is an employee’s description of two jobs as “the same” necessarily accurate?
4. Is vignette #IV an example of discrimination? Harassment?
5. What insights and/or guidance can Judaism offer in these, and similar, situations?
  - a. *Pirkei Avot* 2:5 – Do not judge a fellow human being until you are able to approach his position.
  - b. *Pirkei Avot* 2:6 – In a place where there are no men, you try to be a man.
  - c. Judaism asks that we judge people “*le-kehaf zekhu!*” – on the side of merit. Don’t jump to conclusions.
6. What recourse is there in situations such as these? Are support groups helpful? How can one gain needed support?