It’s Not Just Part of the Job

Breaking the Silence on Sexual Harassment in the Library
Presenters

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“We don’t talk about this.”
Library Literature Review

- A librarian’s helpful, approachable demeanor may be misinterpreted by other people, and make it difficult for the librarian to speak out, either to the patron or to management.

- Virtual reference services allow for more complicated interactions between patrons and librarians.

- “I don’t know any female librarian who hasn’t been harassed or asked out while at work.”*

Sexual Harassment

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What is sexual harassment?
How do you identify harassment?
How can we empower staff?
Why should we talk about it?
What is sexual harassment?
Definition of sexual harassment

: **uninvited** and **unwelcome** verbal or physical **behavior of a sexual nature** especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate (such as an employee or student)

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Title VII's broad prohibitions against sex discrimination specifically cover:

**Sexual Harassment:** This includes practices ranging from direct requests for sexual favors to workplace conditions that create a hostile environment for persons of either gender, including same sex harassment.

Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as physical contact and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and sexual demands, whether by words or actions. Such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem; it is discriminatory when the woman has reasonable ground to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment, including recruitment or promotion, or when it creates a hostile working environment.

Who’s affected by sexual harassment?

- Women are not the only targets of sexual harassment.
- Some studies show people of color experience a higher incidence of sexual harassment than their white colleagues.
- Some studies show LGBTQ people experience a higher incidence of sexual harassment than their straight and/or cisgender colleagues.
- Underage workers (teen employees in grades 9-12) face sexual harassment too.

Sexual harassment can happen to anyone.

For people of color and LGBTQ people, the experience is many-layered.

For teens, problems many manifest in different ways.
People of Color & Sexual Harassment

- People of color are frequently stereotyped and sexualized, and these systemic issues affect the frequency and nature of the harassment they experience.

- Perceptions of sexual harassing behaviors differ across cultural groups. This can influence recognition and reporting of unwanted behavior as harassment.

- Sexual harassment of people of color isn’t just about sex or gender - it’s about race, too.
LGBTQ People & Sexual Harassment

- Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals experience sexual harassment at a higher incidence.

- Studies suggest intersection between transphobia and racism.

- LGBTQ youth are at particular risk for sexual harassment and violence.

- Sexual harassment may include derogatory remarks about sexual orientation - whether or not the person identifies as LGB+.

- Outing colleagues is never OK.
“Not everyone recognizes when they’re being harassed.”
Three Types of Sexual Harassment

**Gender harassment**: unwelcome and offensive comments and behaviors that discriminate based on the target’s gender identity

**Unwanted sexual attention**: unwelcome, persistent comments and behaviors that are driven by sexual innuendo or requests, verbal or tactile

**Sexual coercion**: threats or bribes to coerce the target into sexual activities

Who can be a sexual harasser?

Internal

● Colleagues (peers and supervisors)
● Contractors
● Volunteers

External

● Library patrons
● Members of the public
● Vendors
● Colleagues from other organizations
Recognizing Harassing Behaviors

“It’s hard to tell the difference between harassment and mental illness.”

Harassing behaviors can include:

- Unwelcome sexual advances
- Requests or bribes for sexual activity
- Direct or indirect threats
- Sexual innuendos, comments, and jokes
- Unwelcome touching, including brushing against a person
- Pervasive displays of materials with sexually illicit or graphic content
- Attempted or completed sexual assault

What does this behavior look like in the library?

- Referring to library staff as “baby,” “sweetheart,” “gorgeous,” etc.
- Asking staff members on a date
- Staring at a staff member’s chest when they are wearing a name tag
- Asking for a staff member’s personal contact information
- Following a staff member into a secluded area of the library
- Taking photos of a staff member without their permission
- Asking about a staff member’s schedule (what time they take lunch, what time they leave for the day, etc.)
- Making inappropriate and/or suggestive comments about a staff member’s appearance
- Inquiring about a staff member’s marital or relationship status
Underage Workers & Sexual Harassment

How do teens experience sexual harassment?

- Being asked out even if they said no
- Repeated requests for social or sexual activity
- Inappropriate touching
- Sexual rumors about them
- Comments about their bodies, clothes, sexual orientation, or sexual behavior
- Intimidation or assault

How do you spot the signs of sexual harassment?

- Distracted performance or decline in work quality
- Psychomatic stress symptoms (headaches, stomach pains, insomnia, irritability)
- Drop in self-esteem
- Negative emotions (anger, anxiety, betrayal, depression)

“Employees should feel safe, and know that they are supported by managers.”
Best Practices for Addressing Sexual Harassment

Adopt a strong anti-harassment policy, periodically train each employee on its contents, and vigorously follow and enforce it. The policy should include:

- A clear explanation of prohibited conduct, including examples
- Clear assurance that employees who make complaints or provide information related to complaints will be protected against retaliation
- A clearly described complaint process that provides multiple, accessible avenues of complaint
- Assurance that the employer will protect the confidentiality of harassment complaints to the extent possible
- A complaint process that provides a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation
- Assurance that the employer will take immediate and appropriate corrective action when it determines that harassment has occurred.

Survey Results
What kind of library do you work in?

- **Public**: 92.6%
- **Academic**: 6.3%
- **Special/other**: 1.1%
How many years of experience do you have?

- 0-2 years: 6.3%
- 2-5 years: 14.4%
- 5-10 years: 31.0%
- 10+ years: 48.3%
What’s your age range?

- 18-21: 1.1%
- 22-29: 16.7%
- 30-45: 39.1%
- 45+: 42.5%
63% faced sexual harassment from members of the public
Have you ever faced sexual harassment by members of the public?
Do you feel that administration and your manager take these experiences seriously?
Have your coworkers experienced sexual harassment?

- Yes: 67.8%
- No: 5.2%
- Maybe - I haven't: 27.0%
Do you feel that you’ve been empowered by administration and given the tools to address these issues when they arise?
Let’s talk!
Resources

Introductions to sexual harassment


Sexual harassment in libraries


