

Submission 294

Warning - strong content and offensive words.

By the time I began official work I was already desensitised to sexual harassment, having endured many instances of being followed, heckled, chased, grabbed, and once as a 12 year old I was dragged between caravans at an alley at the local show and the man threw me on the ground then sat on me and tried to strangle me. My younger sister kicked up such a fight, screaming and smacking him in the back of the head, that he let go and took off. It didn't even cross our minds to tell our parents or report it to police as we were so used to the harassment. We were both tall, slim, blonde, with long legs, and this attracted all sorts of unwanted attention. We both recall from the age of 5, cars pulling up and men trying to get us in the car with them. We had a free life, our parents let us roam freely, which meant we came into more contact with these possibilities, however we were once even chased by men on motor bikes while we were riding horses through the bush. Lucky we could ride well, and we escaped.

My first job at 14, the manager kept saying comments about my body and tried to get me into the back room. The other girls said do not go into the back room with him. I left after the 2 week school holidays were finished.

I held many jobs as a teenager, and they were fine, I was treated as a normal person.

At 18 I went to work at a racing stud. The manager invited me to dinner to discuss my future. He kept insisting I drink with him, and I was getting pretty drunk, being unused to alcohol. After a while he insisted I had to sleep with him as company policy. I was drunk and frightened, it was only he and I on this horse stud surrounded by farms. The other workers were in a house, but a fair way away. He was getting angry when I kept refusing. He insisted I drink my drink, but I was doing it too slowly for his liking. He got up to do something in another room, and said I had to finish it by the time he returned. I picked up the milky based strong drink, took a long sip and then happened to swirl it. Luckily I noticed 2 tablets stuck to the bottom of the glass. I picked them off the base and put them in my purse. When he came back he insisted I drink it, so I did. A short time later he launched at me, and I was able to run away. He was old and fat and had no chance to keep up with me. The next day I went to the chemist who said they were sleeping tablets. I went to the local police, but of course he was a well know businessman with deep pockets. They said to me "You should be more careful who you drink with." That was all. I went to the CES (Centrelink) to report his behaviour and they pulled out a thick file on him, and said they would now blacklist him from advertising for staff with them. Many girls had complained, but I was apparently the first girl he had tried to drug and grab.

Fast forward to 2005 where I got a job in the mining industry. Generally where I worked was good, there were very few women and most of the guys were respectful, sometimes a bit cheeky but all without sharp daggers. While I was being trained, the man teaching me kept asking to kiss me. I laughed it off and after I pulled a prank on

him, he stopped asking, he was not a nasty guy, and although I didn't like the requests, he wasn't being creepy so I brushed it off. When I had to drive dump trucks, sometimes I would have to clean up the truck after the guy who had driven it during night shift. Sometimes this meant I had to dispose of rags that had been used through the night for masturbating. It was feral for sure but of course I couldn't report that. I had strong disinfectant, thick gloves and thick skin. I liked working there.

Then I transitioned to another company in the mining sector 3 years later. From day one I was treated poorly. I was a single mum by now, so I needed the money and I stayed there for 10 years. Over that time I endured so much. I will relay some of what happened...

Access to toilets was either very limited or did not exist for women. I sometimes had to change sanitary items in the bush, or in a truck. If I asked to go to a toilet, I was called a princess and told to go on the ground like everyone else.

I was propositioned by a manager I had a lot of respect for, saying he would take me to a hotel and fuck my brains out. It made me really uncomfortable to be near him after that.

I was prevented from completing the necessary training because I was an "incompetent bitch" in the opinion of another manager. He told me this while he threw my paperwork at me, and it scattered all over the floor. He laughed while I picked it all up, crying. I was told over the radio that women shouldn't be allowed on a mine site.

A protected man who had a relative up the ladder, treated me so poorly every day, openly saying how much he hated me. One day he snapped and said he would kill me and eat my children. I was warned from others who knew him that I should be very careful around him, and never be alone where an "accident" could happen. I should watch my back every step. I already knew I could not report this to HR as everyone knew that people who reported anything would lose their job for something else. Another guy reported the threats to management, and he lost his job. When they asked me, I said I was fine. I had no choice as I had to keep my job for my children. It was really awful, and after that he would stare at me, and sneer and laugh. He was put on another shift weeks later, then moved to another site.

I had to buy my own work clothes as the mens clothes were uncomfortable and didn't fit properly, and the company would not purchase womens clothes.

I transitioned into a corporate role in the hope of a better work environment and to be away from shift-work, around more for my children. The corporate environment was much worse than the mine face. More insidious, sexualised and physiologically destructive.

I was bullied relentlessly, by 2 men who had free rein to treat me and others below them as they wished.

One day I had a private meeting with one of the men, who walked behind me and leaned in close, sniffed me and said "I can smell a woman in here" in a deep voice. I told 2 of my managers. Nothing was done, other than I was left off even more important meetings I needed to be at to perform my job.

These 2 would heckle me, then have jokes between them like saying loudly near me "I want to get some Danish ham on my sandwich - oink oink, Danish Ham on my sandwich". I am half Danish.

A prominent engineer I had to work with on the project sent me inappropriate text messages one night, asking if I am smooth, if I like to squeeze, if I want the tongue or the finger, and much more. I kept asking him to stop but it kept coming. By 9pm I phoned my manager and then it stopped but nothing was done about it, and I was so uncomfortable around him after that. I also noticed others he worked closely with start to degrade me too.

I was called a stupid woman in a meeting with colleagues.

After that our whole team had to do the diversity training instead of another event and everyone knew it was "because" of me.

I found it impossible to know how to communicate at this workplace. It was generally all men with a culture around bullying and intimidation. As a woman trying to navigate this, it was impossible to ever act the "right" way. I performed my job well and treated everyone with respect.

My then boyfriend and I went to a Christmas work event and a senior manager was there, someone I worked with regularly enough. We talked work for a little while then he changed the topic to ask us about what sexual positions we used, and what type of toys we enjoy. My boyfriend got very angry but I asked him not to react as I knew I would lose my job if there was an incident or a fight. This seemed to flare the senior manager up and he increased his filthy talk, asking about how big my boyfriends cock is and how much I like it and so on and on and on. I kept asking him to stop, asking him to discuss work topics. I remember feeling disgusted but also I was so used to sexualised derogatory comments that it was a bit normalised for me. My boyfriend was utterly horrified, never having witnessed this behaviour in a workplace before. The manager was sneering and laughing at how uncomfortable my boyfriend was. The manager got another drink. When he returned he "accidentally" spilt his full beer over my breasts, then got some tissues and proceeded to wipe the tissues over my breasts. I took the tissues immediately from him and then my boyfriend and I left. My boyfriend was so horrified and outraged and begged me to report to HR. I said I couldn't, I was a single mum, I would lose my job for sure. The manager sent an apology letter the next day back at work. I spotted a lady who used to go to work events but hadn't for a while. I asked her if she had any run ins with this particular manager and she told me how he had cornered her and her boyfriend at a work event and said the same things to her. I

decided to call the anonymous call up line to report his behaviour so there would be a record of it when it happened again. The man who answered said he could not accept my report anonymously and I could only report to HR directly and not anonymously. I wanted to apply for a promotional activity that meant I would be recognised for significant contributions I had made to the company. I was prevented from applying by my manager. After that I went to speak to a very senior manager and explained how I had been subjected to so much bullying, mistreatment and sexual harassment. He said "What do you expect, working in a male dominated environment?" [REDACTED]. I felt so pathetic and worthless.

I was being treated very poorly by a man I worked with who would say things like 'stop talking, no one wants to hear from you', or 'you make everyone angry', etc in meetings. This man was in charge of giving me my work. Of course he wouldn't. I reported all this to my manager who did absolutely nothing. I went on holiday and when I returned my manager called me into a private meeting where he said "I've asked around and no one here likes you." Or similar words. He also directed me to work solely with the man I had reported to him was bullying me.

Things were so bad by this stage. I was being treated so very badly. To avoid going to work I planned to drive my car into a tree - I thought this would give me a few weeks off in hospital in recovery. Fortunately, a lady asked me where I worked, and the idea of having to say the company name made my brain melt instead and I suffered a complete psychological breakdown.

After being treated by my doctor, I emailed my manager with the news of my illness. He posted [REDACTED] that I wouldn't be back for a while, then he suggested something like everyone should get sick, get down with the sickness, get sick and disturbed. He didn't think I'd see it I guess, or perhaps he knew I would.

After the breakdown I was not contacted by anyone from the company to find out why I was so unwell. I felt so angry that I was so incredibly unwell, caused by my workplace culture. I emailed the CEO to bring it to the attention of the highest management. What a joke that was too. Basically they performed an "independent investigation" into my allegations. I was never interviewed, and the investigator avoided me and the witnesses I had. The report was handed in and I was not allowed to see it, but I was told it found something like - I was too sensitive and took offence too easily. The men in question did not mean to upset me and they did not realise what they were saying and or doing might be taken offensively. - There were no written warnings, no consequences to anyone, except to me, and by proxy - to my children.

What I know now:

I was breaking for years without realising it. I didn't know the signs of psychological illness.

I didn't realise I worked in a physiologically and physically unsafe workplace.

Policies and codes of conduct do not work. They are a joke when they are not upheld.

My children suffered because of my ordeal at my workplace.

My children needed me to be capable and vibrant upon returning (often very late) from work, but I was broken more days than I was well.

I would often come home and stay in bed or curl up on the lounge trying to recover from the work day. It felt like physical pain.

Some weekends I spent in bed - recovering.

I should have left years earlier but I felt I was stuck as a single mum to earn all the money for my family, and there were no other jobs in my specialised industry.

There was no one to turn to for help. I reported all incidents to management as I couldn't go to HR. Nothing was ever done to protect me. I was encouraged to "find a way around this situation myself".

I am so damaged now. This will affect me for the rest of my life. I have no confidence, I am suicidal, I cannot look men in the eye now. I cannot cope with stress. I desperately hope to leave it behind one day and be me again, but it seems a far off dream. If I see anything that reminds me of my old workplace I become so unwell again. Unfortunately things like that are everywhere. Everywhere. I do have a good mental health team supporting me, and work cover have been very helpful. I never thought I would ever say "I have a good mental health team".

I am not the only woman that this has happened to. Men are being hurt at this company too.