



BUILDING PEACEFUL COMMUNITY

Reconnecting Humanity with Humane

Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: A Public Health Approach

The Time is Now

Preface

We are presently at a critical stage in better understanding and more effectively addressing and preventing sexual harassment in the workplace and the greater community. This is largely due to the courage of people, mostly women, speaking out about inappropriate, disrespectful and harmful attitudes and behaviors experienced at work.

Looked at through the lenses of Feminism, social justice, and the trauma of real life experiences, the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace often has been characterized as largely the result of patriarchy, misogyny, and unhealthy social and workplace norms developed by and used by men to misuse their power over, and do harm to, women. As of this writing, increasing numbers of men have been called out for boorish behavior and "held accountable," with a number of high profile men losing their jobs and largely disappearing from public view. Longer term, there are calls to dismantle systems of patriarchy, misogyny, and unhealthy workplace norms, and to allow and promote more women to be in positions of formal power in our workplace and communities.

(To be clear, I do not claim to fully understand nor articulate the scope and pain of women who have experienced harassment at work and their larger lives, but have done my best to summarize my understanding based on life and work experience, and reading and listening to many of the courageous people who have come forward to tell their stories.)

My hope is to offer some additional perspectives to the discussion through the lens of 35 years of experience as a Public Health practitioner focused on developing, implementing, and evaluating Primary Prevention tools and strategies to prevent family violence and build healthy, productive, respectful workplaces. Based on this experience, it is my firm belief that sexual harassment is far more preventable than it may appear at present. I will propose tangible, doable strategies that can make it possible for all of us to experience healthier, more respectful and productive workplaces, communities, and personal relationships, with the explicit goals of ending sexual harassment of women in the workplace, and creating healthy, respectful work environments to the benefit of employees, their employers, and our communities.

As we explore how to more effectively prevent workplace sexual harassment, I believe it is important to ask the question, why have efforts to eliminate smoking in our workplaces been so effective, while simultaneously the problem of sexual harassment has continued? While there are, of

course, significant differences between smoking and sexual harassment at work, I believe that there is much to be learned from the process and strategies so successfully used to eliminate tobacco smoke as a problem in American workplaces, and most public places for that matter.

I will propose that traditional sexual harassment "training" has in fact succeeded at what it has been designed to do: to make people aware of state and federal laws, and of individual employer policies on the topic. What has been largely missing, however, is information on — and the opportunity for co-workers to learn, develop, and implement together — understandings and agreements on how to interact with one another in respectful and healthy ways. It is my belief that by adding Public Health principles and strategies to traditional Human Resource and Legal approaches to the problem of sexual harassment, we can be better positioned to fundamentally change awareness and behaviors in much the same manner we have done around smoking in the workplace. I propose that we challenge ourselves to achieve the seemingly unattainable goal of preventing most acts of sexual harassment and related forms of workplace abuse in a timely manner that will begin to benefit people in their workplaces now and into the future.

Background

In early 1990, as an employee of Ramsey County (Saint Paul, Minnesota) Public Health, I was part of a small group of people given the challenge and opportunity by our County Board to develop a Public Health approach to preventing family violence in our local community. For the next 25 years I worked with hundreds of community members and organizations, developing and implementing a series of strategies that were highly effective in changing awareness, practice, and culture in workplaces and community settings across our county, some of which have been replicated across our state and nation.

Since starting my own practice in 2016 (buildingpeacefulcommunity.org), I have had the privilege of working with a wide variety of workplaces and organizations, including Major League Baseball and numerous local service and educational organizations on refining and developing tailored, effective strategies designed to promote healthy, peaceful attitudes and behaviors in workplace and community settings.

In late 2017 and early 2018, I have paid close attention to the advent of the "Me Too" movement. As many others have said, this movement, and the courage of those who have stepped forward to speak out about their experiences, provides a remarkable opportunity to make real, lasting change in American workplaces. However, I am concerned that with so much attention being paid to responding and reacting to the terrible stories that continue to come forth, we may lose sight of the potential to use this moment to make real, lasting change that will prevent sexual and related forms of workplace harassment from occurring now and into the future.

It is my experience and belief that sexual harassment in the workplace is likely highly preventable, and that measurable progress is possible almost immediately, not decades in the future. I contend that, for the most part, people behave the way they think there are supposed to, and allowed to, at work.

Consider for a moment the time and resources that have been put into sexual harassment policy and training over the past 30 years, and how apparently ineffective these efforts have been in American

workplaces. Compare the impacts of these efforts with the fact that over roughly the same period of time, we have almost completely eliminated smoking in workplaces, and most public places across the nation. Why has sexual harassment in the workplace continued to be such a serious and persistent problem, while smoking at work and in public places has largely become a thing of the past?

I believe that the apparent ineffectiveness in preventing and addressing workplace sexual harassment over the past few decades may be less because these behaviors are inevitable, but rather more because the approaches and training methods we have utilized in retrospect appear not to have been intentionally developed and implemented to prevent the problem from occurring, or, given its prevalence, re-occurring. It has been my experience that traditional Human Resource (HR) and legal-based policies and trainings have been designed to educate employees about federal and state sexual harassment laws and related employer policies on reporting and intervening after harassment has occurred. While this is crucial work, I believe we have largely left out the discussion, development, and implementation of tools and strategies that would clearly articulate healthy workplace conduct norms for people to practice — respectful norms that I believe could more effectively prevent sexual and related forms of workplace harassment from occurring or re-occurring.

Even though there are inherent differences in preventing smoking and sexual harassment in the workplace, I believe that there are some parallels and key lessons to be learned from examining how and why changes in workplace smoking attitudes and behaviors have been so highly effective. Specifically, changes around smoking behaviors have been built first around Public Health principles, with backup from HR and legal counsel as needed; in many ways this is the opposite of how we have traditionally sought to address the problem of sexual harassment, where workplace strategies have centered almost exclusively on HR and legal approaches.

I will review some background on components that have influenced changes in workplace smoking behaviors, as well as key concepts from Public Health and Humanism that may give insight in how to best craft strategies designed to prevent workplace sexual harassment. It is my firm belief that by combining these insights and strategies with more traditional HR and legal approaches, we have a unique opportunity to seize this moment in our history and create more healthy, respectful and productive workplaces for everyone.

Smoking at Mustard's Last Stand, Evanston Hospital, and Ramsey County Public Health

When I was in high school in the early 1970s, I worked at Mustard's Last Stand, a hot dog and hamburger fast food establishment in Evanston, Illinois. In addition to preparing and selling fast food, there was a cigarette vending machine in the dining area. At the time, I was a smoker and would often buy my cigarettes at work, as the machine did not require proof of legal age. While we were not allowed to smoke behind the counter, it was fine to do so in the back room, where food product was stored and prepared, as well as at the tables in front when there were few or no customers.

I graduated from high school in 1973 and soon after was hired at Evanston Hospital, where I worked on and off as an orderly, orthopedic technician, and unit secretary until 1980. At the time, smoking was allowed throughout the hospital — in lobbies and waiting rooms, in the cafeteria, and

in patient rooms and nursing stations. Again, one of my go-to sources for cigarettes (second only to taking them from my mother's dresser drawer) was the vending machine in the Evanston Hospital cafeteria. During my years working on the orthopedic floor, I vividly remember all of us — orderlies, techs, secretaries, nurses, and doctors — being annoyed when a patient on oxygen was brought into one of the rooms on our floor, as we would have to go behind closed doors to smoke in order to avoid possible explosions that could occur from our matches and lighters interacting with enhanced levels of oxygen in the air.

Fast forward to 1987 when I started in a planning position for Ramsey County Public Health. By that time, many workplaces across the nation had already transitioned to being smoke-free, but Ramsey County was not among them. As an ex-smoker (having smoked my last cigarette at 11:59 p.m. on December 31, 1976) I was especially sensitive to cigarette smoke and had become quite self-righteous about not wanting to have to inhale others' smoke. Yet, here I found myself in the middle of a smoky Public Health office. Given that my immediate supervisor was a smoker and our department head was not bothered by the smell, my protestations went unheeded and I ended up sitting in the back of a store room to avoid the fumes.

Then in 1989 a new public health director was hired, and high on his early agenda, backed by the County Manager, was the goal to end smoking in our department offices and throughout the County. Some of the major steps taken to achieve these changes in attitude and behaviors included:

- Gaining support from County Commissioners and developing a clear smoke-free policy (while there had previously not been written policy allowing smoking, until the creation and dissemination of the smoke-free policy, it was an unspoken norm that smoking was allowed);
- Meeting with staff to share the new smoke-free policy and explain the importance of and rationale for moving toward a smoke-free workplace; and
- Developing and implementing phased-in timelines, with participation of smokers and non-smokers, for when smoking would no longer be allowed in various places in our offices, and simultaneously identifying both cessation resources for people interested in quitting, as well as locations outside of County buildings where people could go to smoke.

Within a year, all Public Health offices in the County were smoke-free, and soon after most all County offices and buildings followed suit. Similar steps were taken at workplaces state- and nation-wide, resulting in sweeping, fundamental workplace policy and behavioral norm changes in a relatively short period of time.

While there are significant differences between smoking and sexual harassment at work, I believe there are many similarities that may be useful as we explore next steps in more effectively preventing and addressing workplace sexual harassment. Several elements likely led to the sustained successes we have achieved around ending smoking in the workplace.

- Efforts to eliminate smoking at work were built on the development and articulation of scientific and medical evidence establishing the dangers of exposure to second-hand smoke. This body of knowledge provided a clear rationale to smokers and nonsmokers alike as to why people were being directed to change a behavior at work that had previously been allowed — and in fact promoted by cigarette vending machines and ash trays in offices and public places — for decades.

- There was no ambiguity about what would and would not continue to be allowed regarding smoking behaviors at work. Once workplaces and public spaces nationwide made the policy decision to go smoke-free, the clear direction was that indoor smoking would no longer be allowed, and to a large extent, behavior of smokers quickly changed with relatively little training and need for enforcement and threat of consequences. Today, while unfortunately many people continue to smoke tobacco, clean indoor air has become the expected norm, among smokers and non-smokers alike.
- People who had previously smoked at work were not "held accountable" for having smoked while at work in the past, and were (and often are) generally given alternatives that allowed them to satisfy their addiction to nicotine, while no longer exposing co-workers to the dangers of their second-hand smoke. Early on, many workplaces had designated smoking rooms, some with elaborate ventilation systems. While these kinds of accommodations may be rare today, employees are still allowed time from work during breaks to smoke outdoors as they choose.

(In regard to this final point, I do not at all mean to imply that people who have engaged in egregious, assaultive behavior in the workplace should not be held accountable for their actions. However, I believe that there are many less obvious, though sometimes harmful behaviors, e.g., flirting and continually asking co-workers out, inappropriate clothing at work, etc. that need to be addressed and changed which may not fit as neatly into the "accountability" model. I believe that these less obvious inappropriate behaviors and attitudes will likely become far less prevalent in a relatively short period of time once people learn that they are no longer allowed in the workplace, as well as once they gain a better understanding of how disturbing and even harmful they can be to the people they work with.)

There are myriad additional factors that have played a role in the relatively recent transformation of American workplaces regarding smoking. There are also differences between trying to change attitudes and behaviors associated with smoking and sexual harassment behaviors in the workplace. Despite these complexities and differences however, I believe that one of the most crucial lessons to be taken from this example is that tangible, sustainable, life-saving change is actually achievable in the workplace. Further, the move to smoke-free workplaces was achieved in a relatively short period of time with relatively few resources needed for initial implementation and sustainability over time.

Lessons from Public Health

I will now move to a brief discussion of how we might reconsider the question of how to more effectively prevent workplace sexual harassment through the lens of my understandings of Public Health. There are two core concepts and strategies from Public Health that I believe would be of great value in developing tools and strategies to more effectively prevent sexual harassment in the workplace: Epidemiology and Primary Prevention.

Epidemiology

The Epidemiological approach offers three basic steps to most effectively understand, respond to, and prevent Public Health problems.

1. Clearly identify and define an illness or behavior: *What is the problem?*
2. Identify what is causing and exacerbating the illness or behavior: *Why is it occurring?*
3. Develop, test and implement approaches to address and prevent the illness or behavior, and then test and modify these approaches as needed to ensure effectiveness and sustainability: *How can it be prevented and/or contained?*

In order to assure the highest chance of short- and long-term success, it is crucial to follow each step of the Epidemiology model. If we are not clear on *what* the problem is, and *why* it is occurring, it is unlikely that prevention and intervention strategies will be effective. Intentional development of strategies and tools to prevent and address the problem need to be crafted based on our best understandings of how and why, and then continually tested and modified to assure maximum impact and sustainability.

Returning to the example of smoking, prior to the advent of scientific study establishing links between tobacco use and smoking-related illness, this lack of knowledge and understanding made it unlikely, if not impossible, for individuals and organizations to prevent heart disease and cancers by reducing use of and exposure to tobacco in public places. My parents, a surgeon and a nurse, and most of their peers and family, were avid smokers in the years before there was clear understanding of the dangers of tobacco. While many people today continue to smoke, there is no denying the power of how Epidemiology has impacted understanding, attitudes and behaviors among smokers and nonsmokers alike.

I believe that in regard to the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace, additional work on the first step in the epidemiology model is imperative at this juncture: understanding and articulating more clearly and effectively *what* constitutes sexual harassment and how it harms everyone involved, and the workplace itself.

At the same time that we gather and provide clear information to employees about what constitutes workplace sexual harassment and the behaviors we are working toward preventing and ending, I believe we must also explore and articulate what we seek to achieve. Known as "Appreciative Inquiry," this approach would call on us to identify what constitutes healthy, respectful, appropriate workplace conduct and interaction. It has been my experience working with people across a wide variety of work settings that most people are eager to embrace and work together toward positive work environments and relationships, for their own benefit, and for the well being of those around them. While we need to better articulate what the problem of sexual harassment is, I have found that people are most inspired and engaged when provided the opportunity to participate in creating a vision embracing what we seek, i.e., healthy and respectful work environments.

I further believe that more work needs to be done on the second step of Epidemiology, exploring *why* workplace sexual harassment happens, as well as what positive, protective factors are in place in workplaces where sexual harassment does not occur, so that we can better understand why sexual harassment does occur in some workplaces, and does not in others. Based on answers to the

question "Why?", we can eliminate factors that promote/allow/trigger negative behaviors in unhealthy workplaces, and replicate factors found in healthy, positive workplaces.

While I would not argue with the notion that sexual harassment may be caused at least in part by patriarchy, misogyny, and unhealthy social and workplace norms developed by and used by men to misuse their power over, and do harm to women, I would suggest that there are additional factors worth considering as to why these harmful interactions are occurring in our workplaces that could open up new possibilities toward more effective prevention and intervention approaches. (See the Humanism discussion below for some additional perspectives in considering the question "Why?".)

Finally, the third step in the practice of Epidemiology — *how* to seek prevention; testing and then modifying strategies, based on evidence of effectiveness — is crucial. While I mean no disrespect to people who have been doing policy development and training on workplace sexual harassment for decades, it appears that much of this work has not achieved the goal of preventing or eradicating workplace sexual harassment, given the continued prevalence the problem. It is my belief that given the magnitude of harm that too many people have endured and are still experiencing at work, in spite of all our best efforts to date, we might consider some significant changes in approach, built on the principles of Epidemiology as outlined above, as well as Primary Prevention and Humanism.

What we think, What we know

The discipline of Epidemiology teaches us that it is crucial to seek out and learn from available data on whatever problems we seek to address, in order to develop prevention and intervention strategies based on facts to the extent possible. It has been my experience that sometimes research and data corroborate my own pre-conceived notions, while other times these findings can be surprising and challenging to my initial assumptions.

Research on family violence (domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual violence) that I have studied for decades often provides somewhat surprising results, with consistent findings that females and males are impacted by violence at rates that are much more similar than many of us may assume, as shown by the data below.

- More than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
—from CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*
- Intimate Partner Violence resulted in 2,340 deaths in 2007, accounting for 14% of all homicides. Of these deaths, 70% were females and 30% were males.
—from CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *Understanding Intimate Partner Violence Fact Sheet 2012*
- An estimated 27.2% of women and 11.7 % of men have experienced unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime.
—from CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*

When broken down by specific Communities of Color, available data indicate that the gap between women and men who experience violence in their lifetimes is even narrower, as demonstrated by the following estimates of American adults who have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.

- American Indian/Alaska Native women: 46%
 - American Indian/Alaska Native men: 43.5%
 - Non-Hispanic Black women 43.7%
 - Black men: 38.6%
 - Multiracial non-Hispanic women 53.8%
 - Multiracial men: 39.3%
- from CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*

Finally, data on sexual assault in the U.S. military indicate that the majority of service members who are victims of sexual assault may in fact be males. (As surprising as this statement may seem initially, it makes more sense when coupled with the fact that males account for roughly 85% of the U.S. military.)

“In its latest report on sexual assault, the Pentagon estimated that 26,000 service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2012, up from 19,000 in 2010. Of those cases, the Pentagon says, 53% involved attacks on men, mostly by other men.”

– from *The New York Times*, June 23, 2013

To be clear, I am not presenting this information to in any way question or minimize the prevalence nor impact of gender-based violence against women. I also acknowledge that there are always limitations to social science studies. What I can say, though, is that based on studying data on the problem of family violence for over three decades, the findings outlined above have been consistent over time and place (international, national, and state level data.)

Again, there is no question that women and girls are disproportionately harmed by gender-based violence. However, to my mind the power of these studies is that they allow us to make the argument that everyone is impacted by violent, harmful and disrespectful behaviors. This recognition provides the rationale for a collective call to action, inviting everyone to be part of the solution: joining together to promote caring and respect in our homes, communities and workplaces.

Reports on workplace sexual harassment tend to focus on reports of actionable incidents, which most likely do not reflect much larger extent of incidents going unreported. As summarized below, a statewide Minnesota Poll conducted for the *Star Tribune*, completed in January, 2018, provided some insights into understanding the larger scale of the problem of workplace sexual harassment, and interestingly, differences in how it is both experienced and perceived by women and men in Minnesota.

Have you ever you personally experienced sexual harassment, or not?

	Yes	No
All respondents	37%	61%
Women	63%	37%
Men	11%	89%

Would you say sexual harassment in the workplace is a major or minor problem?

	Major	Minor
All respondents	50%	35%
Women	57%	27%
Men	44%	43%

In your own workplace, would you say sexual harassment is a major problem, minor problem, or no real problem at all?

	Major	Minor	No problem
All respondents	2%	13%	46%
Women	3%	12%	31%
Men	1%	15%	61%

Overall, do you think the firings, suspensions and other actions taken against people accused of sexual harassment have been too harsh, too lenient or about right?

	Too harsh	Too lenient	About right
All respondents	19%	10%	62%
Women	21%	14%	57%
Men	17%	6%	67%

I believe that these survey results suggest some expected, and, some surprising, findings.

- There is a significant and unsurprising gap between women and men in having personally experienced workplace sexual harassment.
- There is a gap, though smaller than I would have expected, between how seriously women and men regard the problem of sexual harassment.
- While large percentages of women and men regard workplace sexual harassment as a problem, and two-thirds of women report having experienced harassment, surprisingly small percentages of both women (3%) and men (1%) report experiencing it in their own workplace (I assume at present).
- Women and men appear to be in agreement on their perceptions of the appropriateness of consequences for people who have committed acts of sexual harassment in the workplace; surprisingly to me, men may if anything be more open to harsh consequences than women.

(See <http://www.startribune.com/complete-minnesota-poll-results-sexual-harassment/469582933/> for full Poll results and *Star Tribune* analysis.)

We need to continue to seek and generate reliable information in the future to help us better understand the prevalence and impacts of sexual harassment in the workplace. I do believe though that existing research such as the CDC studies and Minnesota Poll results outlined above provide a strong basis to take action in developing, implementing, and evaluating prevention strategies in our workplaces today.

I believe that these findings indicate the potential for building our prevention strategies on the premise that we all have an interest in preventing and healing from sexual harassment in our workplaces. A starting point for this work, built on the discipline of Epidemiology, is to work toward everyone having a better understanding of the scope and destructive impacts of this problem on women, and men as well, and to offer strategies everyone can participate in together to prevent these problems and make it possible for people to work in healthy, respectful environments .

The Public Health Approach to Preventing Workplace Sexual Harassment proposed at the end of this discussion provides proposed steps and strategies for initiating and implementing such transformative learning and change in our workplaces.

Primary Prevention

Public Health strategies are often built on principle of Primary Prevention, in which we bring messages and tools to everyone in a given population to protect the well-being of everyone, establish healthy behavioral norms, and try to prevent potentially damaging behaviors or practices from occurring in the first place. Creating smoke-free workplaces and public places is a great example of Primary Prevention — everyone, non-smokers and smokers alike are in healthier environments, free of tobacco smoke. Living smoke-free, at least in workplaces and most public places, has become the norm. People who do not yet smoke no longer see becoming a smoker as normal, or even inevitable, as it often felt in the days when smoking in public places was considered normal, and almost expected.

In my experience developing, implementing, and evaluating Primary Prevention approaches to various forms of violence and other Public Health issues, I have observed (and experienced myself) that it can be challenging to believe in this approach on issues where you know the problem is, in fact, already occurring. To some extent, I believe this is why most traditional approaches to the problem of workplace sexual harassment and other forms of violence have focused more on identifying and intervening with people who either have been harmed or have committed harm to others, as opposed to taking a Primary Prevention approach of trying to avoid the problem before it occurs. We will always need to help those who have been harmed, and address inappropriate attitudes and behaviors exhibited by those who hurt people in their lives. At the same time, it has been my experience that Primary Prevention approaches to the problem of violence can be highly impactful, and can transform attitudes and behaviors, reminding people of our inherent ability to exhibit and practice respect and compassion.

As an example, I recently had the opportunity to work with an Employee Assistance Program to develop and bring tools and resources to staff, management, and players with four Major League Baseball teams, operating under a mandate from the Commissioner's Office to provide training on domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual violence throughout the baseball community. The approach we developed was built on the notion of Primary Prevention. Instead of coming in presuming that our audience was engaged in or wishing to engage in these hurtful behaviors, we

approached participants with the presumption that most of them wanted to do the very best for their families and loved ones, and that our role was to bring them knowledge and tools that could help them in practicing healthy, positive relationships. Participants were also informed about how they could find confidential resources to help them and their families as needed to address individual and family issues and concerns.

This approach, summarized in the document *Preventing Family Violence and Promoting Healthy Relationships With Major League Baseball* (found at www.buildingpeacefulcommunity.org under Articles and Videos) was very well received by the hundreds of people who participated, with the consistent critique that they wished we had more than the allotted 45-60 minutes to continue talking about healthy relationships.

As suggested in the Preface, I believe that one reason traditional Human Resource/legal-based sexual harassment training has apparently failed to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace to a satisfactory degree is because these trainings were designed to educate about laws and policies, not to prevent the problem. Epidemiology can be used to better understand and articulate to all employees what constitutes both unhealthy and healthy workplace relationships and norms. Primary Prevention principles would start with the premise that most employees do not come to work with a desire to sexually harass their colleagues, leading to workplace environments where people can better understand and practice respect in their interactions with one another.

Returning to the Question Why? — Empathy and Humanism

Returning for a moment to the question of *Why?*, I believe that one of the greatest challenges in effectively preventing sexual harassment in the workplace (and all forms of violence) is to try to have empathy — to understand how our fellow humans could do harm to us and the people we care about, without questioning and dismissing their fundamental humanity. It has been my experience that empathy, when brought up concerning the difficult topic of violence, is sometimes perceived as offering excuses; when I suggest we need empathy, it is in the hope that we can better understand, not excuse, root causes and triggers of harmful attitudes and behaviors. While I agree that there are no excuses for harming others, I do believe that better, empathetic understanding of our fellow humans, and ourselves, is absolutely critical to any hopes of more effectively preventing violence in general, and workplace sexual harassment specifically.

Our fundamental beliefs about what it means to be human will shape any strategies we may develop to try to address and prevent workplace sexual harassment, and other forms of violence. Much of my journey in the field of violence prevention, and in my own life, has been a search for my own understanding of what it means to be human. What follows is a brief discussion of what I have found to be most relevant and resonant as I continue to try to gain a better sense of how to address these fundamental questions, at least for myself.

When confronting violence and hurtful behaviors, it can be challenging to even consider the idea that all people may have within them, and seek to live their lives from, a core place of health, caring and love. While this premise may sound Pollyanna-ish, the book *A General Theory of Love*, written by three psychiatrists (Drs. Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon) in fact argues and documents from a biological and anthropological standpoint that connection, caring, and yes, love, are the key emotional underpinnings of humans, and the roadmap to healthy, sustainable families

and communities. According to Lewis, Amini and Lannon, while it may not be all we need, love and connection is indeed something we all need in our lives.

In my search for ways to better understand humans and prevent violence, I am drawn to the hopeful message in *A General Theory of Love* — that we all have the capacity, and in fact fundamental need for, connection and love. At the same time, I have continued to seek ways to better understand when we humans turn to darkness, and how we can do such terrible harm to others (and ourselves).

I have learned from the work of Dr. James Gilligan, Susan Faludi, and Rollo May that while those who commit acts of violence are often those who objectively possess power, which clearly would point to men in the case of workplace sexual harassment, the irony is that those who misuse their power may often do so from a subjective sense and experience of powerlessness and shame.

I realize that the standard equation of battering and homicidal husbands (as well as of men who commit rape) is that they want to "control" the women they abuse. Of course they do, and that is one perfectly valid way of describing an aspect of their motivation. Nothing in my analysis of their behavior contradicts that. But when asking the additional question, Why do they want to control their wives?, I can only conclude that their desire for omnipotence is in direct proportion to their feeling impotence.

– Dr. James Gilligan, *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes*

Six years ago I set out to explore the American male dilemma. My hope, my guiding star then, was the thought that I might tackle the question that had plagued so many women, myself included: why do our male brethren so often and so vociferously resist women's struggles toward independence and a fuller life?... It also seemed evident wherever I looked in these years that men see women's advancement as a driving force behind their own distress. But for the many men I've met researching this book, that gender battle was only a surface manifestation of other struggles. The wellsprings of their anguish were more obscure, and flowed through deeper channels...I was struck all the more by how tragic it is that women and men find themselves so far apart. If my travels taught me anything about the two sexes, it is that each of our struggles depends on the success of the other's. Men and women are at a historically opportune moment where they hold the keys to each other's liberation.

– Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*

Deeds of violence in our society are performed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate that they too are significant. Violence arises not out of superfluity of power, but out of powerlessness.

– Rollo May, *Power and Innocence*

I have learned from Dr. James Garbarino about core needs that most all humans have, and from Rosabeth Moss Kanter about how we often respond in the workplace when our needs go unmet and we end up caught, again, in a feeling of powerlessness and emptiness.

All people have three fundamental needs: Stability, Security, and Affirmation.

– Dr. James Garbarino, *Ecological Approaches to Violence Prevention Keynote*

In organizations, it is powerlessness that "corrupts," not power. When people feel powerless, they behave in petty, territorial ways. They become rules-minded and they are over-controlling, because they're trying to grab hold of some piece of the world they do not control and then over-manage it to death.

– Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*

Finally, I have learned from Malcolm Gladwell that while there are core changes we all must commit to in order to realize a more just society, e.g. confronting sexism, racism and economic oppression among many other social toxins, we can also take action, in present time, to perhaps change many — if not most — people's behavior in the workplace by changing immediate situation and context. This may be one way of understanding how we have been able to eliminate smoking in the workplace without changing the fact that large numbers of people remain physically and socially addicted to tobacco.

The Fundamental Attribution Error...is a fancy way of saying that when it comes to interpreting other people's behavior, human beings invariably make the mistake of overestimating the importance of fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of situation and context.

–Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*

Applying the Fundamental Attribution Error to better understanding workplace behaviors, and specifically sexual harassment, I am reminded of a presentation many years ago by Dr. Eric Knox, at the time a retired Twin Cities physician. Dr. Knox suggested that as we experience gradual breakdowns of behavioral, technical and ethical standards in our workplaces, we run the risk of falling into a state that he described as "Normalized Deviance."

I suggest that we consider the possibility that the inappropriate and harmful behaviors we are seeing and experiencing at work, while certainly influenced by overarching factors including sexism, may also in part be the result of environments (situations and contexts) that may be inadvertently allowing and condoning these behaviors, moving us into what Knox described as "Normalized Deviance."

Whatever formal workplace wellness policies may have been in place at the time, cigarette machines in the Evanston Hospital cafeteria and smoking staff in the Ramsey County Public Health office gave the clear message to employees and visitors that smoking was normal, and to some degree expected. As we move forward to prevent and interrupt the cycle of workplace sexual harassment, we may wish to consider the impacts of gradual, often invisible breakdowns of community and workplace standards that may have allowed and promoted these harmful behaviors to become commonplace. Equally important, we must work to intentionally replace hurtful attitudes and behaviors which have become "normal" with intentional messages, situations, and contexts that promote and facilitate respectful, healthy interaction at work.

It would be a remarkable act of hubris and foolishness to claim to fully understand and have the ability to articulate the field of Public Health, let alone what it means to be human, and certainly do not suggest that I have the solution to these age-old puzzles. I will though own what I have come to believe based on that the ideas explored above — combined with the experiences I have had living on this earth for 60+ years, interacting with fellow humans in a variety of workplace settings and

spending more than half of my life developing, implementing, and evaluating a variety of approaches to preventing violence.

- I believe that we humans are simultaneously remarkably wonderful and remarkably flawed. We are at the same time capable of stunning beauty and grace, and unthinking and unthinkable cruelty.
- I believe that we humans seek, and desperately need connection, love, and affirmation. I believe that we are often clumsy and confused in these pursuits, and that male humans are prone to doing serious harm to others and ourselves in our clumsiness and confusion. Much of this confusion plays out in workplaces, where most of us we spend large portions of our waking lives, and where we have to-date failed to develop and communicate clear expectations and norms that are easily translatable into healthy, respectful behavior and human interaction.
- I believe that we humans spend large amounts of our life on this earth bombarded by toxic media messages and unhealthy social environments, and in workplaces that often leave us feeling isolated and powerless. Much of our behavior can be understood as reactions to these toxicities. This is in no way an excuse for people harming others, but it is a potential explanation.
- I believe that we humans are innately sensitive and responsive to our immediate surrounding environments. To the extent that behaviors in a given environment are repetitive and predictable, there are very likely factors in that environment that may be triggering or prompting those behaviors. In my work and life I have found that when we intentionally reduce negative prompts and unhealthy social norms, and offer messages and options for behavior based in respect and health, most people will embrace and practice these new, healthier, more respectful norms.
- I believe that we have the responsibility to act now, based on the courage and truths of people who have spoken, and continue to speak out about the realities of workplace sexual harassment through the Me Too movement and other courageous people and actions.
- By adding Public Health insights and strategies to the groundwork provided by traditional HR and legal approaches to workplace sexual harassment over recent decades, I believe that transformational change which would realize the goal of preventing and ending most instances of workplace sexual harassment is within our grasp. We have the tools, commitment, and obligation to act. The time is now.

A Public Health Approach to Preventing Workplace Sexual Harassment

1. Respectful Workplace Policies

I believe that the first, critical step in preventing workplace sexual harassment is to assure that workplaces have clear, understandable policies in place articulating their commitments to being respectful work environments, and that these policies are shared with all employees and others doing business with the organization. An excellent example of this comprehensive approach is the *Ramsey County Workplace Violence Prevention and Respectful Workplace Policy* (see Policy text in References and Resources section.) The Ramsey County Policy, developed in part through listening sessions with employees county-wide, articulates the county's commitment to being a violence-free, respectful workplace; provides clear definitions of violence; states that the policy applies to everyone, including elected and appointed officials as well as all levels of employees, contractors, and visitors doing business with the county; and includes a set of clear action steps to assure successful implementation and sustainability.

2. Organizational Assessment

Concurrent with development and/or refinement of violence prevention and respectful workplace policies, organizational assessments are important in order to identify previous and current training and policy work on sexual harassment that can be built and expanded upon. The assessment process will also identify previous and current issues of disrespect that have arisen in the workplace that need to be acknowledged, addressed, and hopefully resolved, as well as organizational strengths that can be built upon to help achieve the goal of being a healthy, respectful, productive workplace .

3. Respectful Workplace Workshops: Clear Understandings; Multi-Layered Agreements; Resources

Once policy and organizational assessment work has been completed, implementation of the Public Health Approach would be realized organization-wide through tailored Respectful Workplace Workshops. Ideally, these workshops would be created with participation of formal and informal leaders within the organization, so that they would reflect the culture, style, and needs of the workplace. Allotting reasonable amounts of time for workshops is crucial, both to allow for effective discussion, learning, and follow-up, as well as to demonstrate organizational commitment to real, lasting change. While the realities of each workplace will dictate what is feasible, I would suggest a commitment to at least two organization-wide in-person workshops, with ongoing follow up discussions at staff meetings within individual workgroups.

Respectful Workplace Workshops would provide clear understanding, for everyone, of the scope and impacts of sexual harassment, the organization's commitment to being a positive, respectful place for everyone to work, and their individual and collective roles in creating a positive work environment. Workshops would result in multi-layered understanding and agreement for all staff on:

- federal and state sexual harassment law;
- organization-wide violence prevention and respectful workplace policies; and
- development and commitment to new, clearly understandable respectful workplace norms, that all parties agree to adhere to and practice daily.

In addition to these prevention and educational components, Respectful Workplace Workshops would provide everyone with content and contact information regarding available resources (HR,

Employee Assistance Program services, community mental health and social service programs, etc.) for individuals and groups who may need additional assistance in addressing and resolving individual and/or group conflicts and concerns. It is important to offer these resources in a non-stigmatizing manner, both for people who have experienced workplace harassment, as well as those who may need help in better understanding and changing previous attitudes and behaviors that they will have come to recognize as inappropriate and hurtful as a result of workshop learning experiences.

This proposed Public Health Approach will require significant commitment on the part of individuals and organizations. Changing social and workplace norms by definition requires a serious commitment. The approach, facilitating organizational policy, assessment, and learning experiences tailored to the realities and needs of workplaces and individual work groups, is designed to achieve maximum short, mid- and long-term impact toward preventing workplace sexual harassment and building healthier, more respectful, and more productive work environments.

The Approach is based on the principles of Public Health, Epidemiology and Humanism outlined previously in this paper, as well as decades of real life practice, described in articles and videos cited in the References and Resources section below. Two current examples of similar initiatives in action are 2015-17 Major League Baseball training workshops, and Refreshing Your Workplace workshops being provided at local non-profit and educational institutions.

In 2015 the Office of the Commissioner of Baseball developed a policy requiring training on preventing domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault for everyone associated with Major League Baseball (MLB), ranging from the Commissioner's Office itself to players, coaches, and all levels of field and administrative staff. I was invited by the Sand Creek Group Employee Assistance Program to develop and co-facilitate prevention trainings for coaches, managers, minor league players, and staff from four MLB teams. On-site training workshops with content and format similar to this Public Health Approach were provided in 2015 and 2016 to over 700 people. Evaluations from MLB workshop participants were very positive, described in *Preventing Family Violence and Promoting Healthy Relationships With Major League Baseball* (see www.buildingpeacefulcommunity.org).

I have also had the opportunity over the last two years to develop and facilitate Refreshing Your Workplace workshops (see www.buildingpeacefulcommunity.org) with a range of local non-profit and educational organizations. Through these tailored workshops, hundreds of participants have engaged in authentic workplace learning and conversation about individual and collective action they can take to assure respectful, healthy relationships with one another and the people they serve. While not specifically designed to address sexual harassment, uniformly positive feedback and signs of positive change from Refreshing Your Workplace workshop participants leaves me convinced that this style of adult learning can be easily modified to speak to this difficult issue as well, holding great promise for more effective workplace sexual harassment prevention.

We stand together in a unique moment, brought forward through the Me Too movement and many other courageous people, to build on previous HR and legal efforts to more effectively prevent workplace sexual harassment. The principles, tools, and successes of Public Health provide a compelling road map for achieving transformational change. Now is our time to act.

A Final Note on Restorative Justice

While the focus of this article has been on primary prevention of workplace sexual harassment, clearly a comprehensive approach to this problem must include effective secondary and tertiary prevention/intervention strategies to address harms that have occurred. I believe that the principles and practices of Restorative Justice are worthy of consideration as we seek to bring justice, and I would hope, some healing, to our workplaces in response to harm that has already occurred.

Restorative Justice is built on the idea that when an act of harm/crime is committed, the people most impacted are the individuals directly involved, their immediate families, witnesses and people closest in their lives, and the surrounding community. This view stands in contrast to our nation's Criminal Justice system, which considers the harm/crime as being against, and accountability directed to, the "state."

Restorative Justice practices are designed to allow for impacted individuals, their family and friends, and the larger community to fully understand the extent and effects of harm that has taken place. As appropriate, Restorative Justice provides opportunities and the challenge for the person(s) who committed harm to own and acknowledge their action and its consequences, and to offer to make amends, and seek healing for all.

Restorative Justice practices in schools and communities have been highly effective in cases where all parties have the wish and ability to confront and address harm that has occurred. While there will be cases when the aggrieved party does not wish to participate in this approach, it has been my experience in working with my own colleagues, as well consulting with numerous other workplaces, that Restorative Justice principles and practices can allow for the possibility of healing and culture change in the workplace, especially when problems and inappropriate behaviors and environments are identified and confronted early on, before serious, less reparable harm has been done.

References and Resources

Federal Sexual Harassment Law (see <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-sex.cfm>)

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII applies to employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations, as well as to the federal government.

Sexual Harassment

It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex. Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general.

Both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex.

Although the law doesn't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted).

The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or someone who is not an employee of the employer, such as a client or customer.

Articles and videos on Public Health approaches to building healthy, respectful workplaces and communities, and preventing family violence through workplace transformation

Reflection: Working Toward Peaceful, Healthy Communities, Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies, Volume 3 No.1, Winter, 2016

<https://pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/ijps/article/view/120>

Creating Healthy Work Environments, University of Minnesota Katherine J. Densford International Center for Nursing Leadership, November 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS2hqOVdcDY>

Creating Respectful, Violence-Free, Productive Workplaces: A Community-Level Response to Workplace Violence, Aggression in Organizations: Violence, Abuse and Harassment at Work and in Schools, Haworth Press, 2004

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J135v04n03_08

Understanding and Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace, Family Violence & Sexual Assault Bulletin, Vol. 19 No. 4, Fall 2003

Text of the Ramsey County (Minnesota) Workplace Violence Prevention and Respectful Workplace Policy Effective Date: Tuesday, August 23, 1994

POLICY STATEMENT

Ramsey County strives to provide a workplace where all employees, customers, and all others doing business are treated with dignity and respect and is committed to prevention of workplace violence.

APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all elected and appointed officials, managers, and supervisors, employees, customers and clients, and providers of contracted services.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The county establishes as its vision that all its officials, managers/supervisors, and other employees treat each other, their customers and clients, and all others with courtesy, dignity and respect.

The county further recognizes that violence at work, family violence, sexual violence, and other forms of threatening behavior (violence) can adversely affect employees' work performance and their lives outside of work.

The county acknowledges that many of its employees are exposed to violence by the nature of their jobs and is committed to providing support and assistance for these employees.

Accordingly, the county commits to a series of actions to assure that all employees, customers, and others doing business with the county:

- are aware of the spirit and intent of this policy
- are provided with resources and tools for how to be a part of a respectful workplace
- are held accountable should they commit acts of violence in the workplace, and have avenues for resolution and support if they experience violence in their workplace, their families or communities.

The county affirms its commitment to ongoing efforts in programs and services to promote peaceful families and peaceful communities including:

- community-based violence prevention efforts
- other national, state, and local initiatives to prevent workplace, family, sexual, and community violence.

The county will not tolerate acts of violence. Its goal is to eliminate violence in the workplace. Procedures have been developed to assure:

- managers, supervisors, employees and officials are held accountable should they commit acts of violence in the workplace, and
- employees who experience violence within their families, workplace or communities have avenues for resolution and support.

Action steps taken to implement this policy include:

- this policy is posted prominently in all county facilities and provided in written form to all employees.
- this policy is referenced in all county agreements to purchase services.
- all elected and appointed officials, managers, supervisors and employees are provided with resources outlining expectations and strategies for creating and maintaining a respectful workplace.
- all employees are made aware of procedures that address violence in the workplace and its consequences.
- training designed to provide practical skills in recognizing and resolving conflict was developed and is offered for managers, supervisors, other employees and elected officials.
- resources are provided to employees and their families who experience violence and there is no adverse employment consequences for those who avail themselves of these resources.

AUTHORITY

This policy and the procedures herein were prepared under the authority of the County Manager, as delegated to the Director of Human Resources.

DEFINITIONS

Violence and Disrespect : Include but are not limited to: words and actions that hurt or attempt to threaten or hurt people. It includes any action involving the use of physical force, harassment, intimidation or misuse of power and authority resulting in fear, pain, or injury

RESPONSIBILITIES

All county departments and personnel are responsible for:

- assuring that dignified and respectful behavior is expected and practiced in all county facilities.
- reporting immediate or potential dangers of violence.

PROCEDURES

To stop workplace violence and disrespect:

- concerns should be discussed with your supervisor or manager.
- if for any reason you prefer not to discuss this with your immediate supervisor or manager, discuss it with another manager in your department or Human Resources.
- if you or another person is in immediate danger call 911 first (you do not need to dial 9 first to get an outside line) and then call your building security.