

THE TWENTIES: NURTURING FEMALE TALENT IN MALE DOMINATED WORKPLACES

Minutes



Date	17 th October, 2023
Time	16:45 – 18:00
Venue	Lords Committee Room G and via Zoom
Chair	Baroness Uddin
Speakers	Laura Bates , Founder of the Everyday Sexism Project Zelda Perkins , Co-Founder of Can't Buy My Silence Emily Kimberlin , Senior Estimator at Barratt Developments Claire Reindorp , Chief Executive, Young Women's Trust
Theme/ Background information	<p>42% of young women have experienced discrimination while working or looking for work, while 33% of HR decision makers agree that sexist behaviour exists within their organisation. Even excluding outright discrimination, many of the highest-paying industries are male dominated and can be hostile to women.</p> <p>As workers lower down the corporate ladder, women in their 20s are particularly at risk from harassment and discrimination – and in a continuing cost of living crisis, the stakes have never been higher.</p> <p>This session will look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexism, sexual harassment and hostility in the workplace• Career progression within male dominated industries and offices• Speaking up and whistle-blowing

NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

Baroness Uddin

Uddin explained how the scope of the APPG has been significant as the group looks at all aspects of employment, with the focus of this meeting being on women in their 20s and nurturing female talent in male dominated workspaces. Uddin shared that in her 20s she remembered being more hopeful for change and to see more parity in the working world, and now hopes we will see more parity for women in management spaces.

She acknowledged the continuing problems of sexual harassment in the workplace and in many predominantly male industries. She shared her personal experience of seeing service industries

dominated by women, where they don't go beyond such positions. She noted that many different women feel their respective industries don't give due regard to women in their areas.

Laura Bates

Bates said she started the Everyday Sexism Project in her early twenties in response to her own experiences of sexism and those of other women in and outside of workplaces when she was starting her career. She told stories of women who were left out of client meetings because they happened at strip clubs and women who were rated in the office. The Everyday Sexism Project collates experiences of gender inequality and shows that the most common experience of sexism logged was sexism in the workplace.

She noted the complexity of sexism in the workplace as it can take many forms, like questions about family in interviews, assumptions that female colleagues are junior, and prescribing women secretarial tasks like making coffees. She argued we should expand our idea of what sexual harassment and discrimination looks like in the office. She noted how discrimination against maternity risk also starts at entry points and can affect a woman's progression in the workplace.

She argued these different forms of sexism are more acute in male dominated industries and can escalate to sexual assault. She cited a study which said 1 in 8 women had experienced unwanted kisses or sexual touches in their workplace.

She cited a report from Everyday Sexism and the TUC which found 2/3 of young women had been sexually harassed at work; it often goes unreported and has lasting knock-on events, such as women not putting themselves forward for better positions or joining certain projects. She noted this has a disproportionate effect on women in insecure work, or zero hours contracts. She said this issue is intersectional, noting an interviewer who once said he liked spicy and exotic women to a black woman and asked for a lap dance from a woman in a wheelchair. She noted that stereotypes can worsen the objectification of women, pointing out roles like nurses and air hostesses as examples. She argued that companies that deal with this robustly can experience higher worker satisfaction and lower staff turnover, bringing a business incentive for robust procedures to deal with sexual harassment at work. She also argued that greater diversity at higher levels is proven to improve workplace culture.

She concluded by saying that it is a responsibility of employers to prevent sexual harassment, not just respond to it, and that part of this is improving understanding of rights and responsibilities at work amongst employees.

Zelda Perkins

Perkins introduced herself, explaining her personal experience of NDA agreements and how this provided her with a platform to discuss them. She argued that the wealthy have a systemic advantage over others in that they can 'buy' justice. She explained how she was told to be careful of Harvey Weinstein when she started to work under him, which she noted as being a common experience for women. She said when you start a job, women often talk about which men are not safe to be alone with, describing this as a fact of life.

She detailed her difficulties in getting the law involved to deal with her case at the time and explained that in 1998 she didn't have the language to describe sexual harassment. She said the first problem was the normalisation of this behaviour in the working world. She argued people

cannot be bystanders, noting that not intervening enables the problem. She said the most powerful thing you can say to someone in a workplace is calling out inappropriate behaviour directly and in front of everybody, even if it is not raised officially.

She argued that a difficulty faced when you get to a point of holding someone to account is the disparity of power between those who are more junior, and those who have access to more resources and lawyers. She explained how those at the beginning of their career feel they have more to lose in this regard and they do not want to jeopardise their livelihoods or career progression.

Perkin's organisation Can't Buy My Silence has changed legislation around NDA agreements at universities, and argued for workplaces to have stricter regulation, to ban NDAs around sexual assault across different areas.

Emily Kimberlin

Kimberlin detailed her experience of joining the construction industry after leaving university, and of being a woman in her 20s in a predominantly male industry. She uses the term 'predominantly male' instead of 'male dominated' as the latter inherently gives men power.

She said she had always been aware of gender imbalance and bias, and how she is treated differently to male counterparts. She noted that she previously never considered how her own behaviour was being impacted by being in a predominantly male industry. She shared that she is normally the only woman in a meeting, and questioned if, in these settings, she is more likely to say yes, or feel like she needs to be invited to speak. She said that being able to recognise these behaviours made her more confident to make changes.

She noted her successes in the industry and partially credited the Catalyst programme, which supports women's networking and has helped advance her career.

It was at a networking session that she found her current position at Under One Roof. She noted how Under One Roof recently welcomed their first male member and holds discussions and virtual events. She said the vision of Under One Roof is that all colleagues should thrive regardless of gender. She said that Under One Roof notes blind spots in the industry and campaigns on specific issues, like advocating for better access to women's toilets. This network has just shy of 200 members, with plans for networking circles and tea and chats.

She suggested that women in predominantly male industries can't make change alone and must foster allyship.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin shared that she started her career within construction as a receptionist. She asked Emily how the industry has moved in terms of its diversity and if that's reflected in the network.

Emily Kimberlin

Emily pointed her to Mosaic, another network, which is a group for ethnic minorities in the construction industry and noted how Mosaic and Under One Roof have joined together for a listening circle.

Claire Reindorp

Claire introduced herself as the chair of the Young Women's Trust, which is particularly focused on women on low pay or no pay. She noted the important context of women earning 1/5 less than men and pointed out that this is because of the higher percentages of women in lower paid industries like care, retail and hospitality.

She shared findings of the Young Women's Trust which showed more than 40% faced discrimination in the workplace and noted that these figures are higher for specific groups like women of colour, young women, and working-class women.

She focused on the correlation between how long someone spends in a workplace and how much their pay increases, and noted how, for women, this was a weak correlation, showing women are getting stuck. She labelled the so called 'sticky floor' as an issue for women in their twenties, who can get into the workplace but struggle to move up due to various barriers.

She cited that one third of young women are concerned about their job security, which feeds into how sexual harassment is reported. She went on to cite that 1 in 4 women said they had been sexually harassed in the workplace. She discussed what sexual harassment can practically look like, for example managers scheduling young women on later shifts where they feel more vulnerable. She discussed how job security feeds into this culture, citing a young mum who needed her job being asked to lift her top up.

She explained that the fact many women don't know about reporting systems is a roadblock to change and advocated for women to have a better understanding of HR systems in their workplaces, and of their rights.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin expressed her hurt at hearing the testimonies cited by Clare and then opened the floor up for questions.

Participant: Ellie

Ellie introduced herself as an engineer who works in the construction industry, noting how very few women are in engineering, and that this is worsened by the fact that lots of graduates who aim to go into engineering later go on to work elsewhere because the industry is a bad place to work as a woman.

She asked others about experiences and advice for people who get push back against for calling out sexism and pushing for a change in culture.

Participant: Suzanne

Suzanne Pearson introduced herself as a prospective Conservative candidate in the upcoming election who had a long career in law and financial services as a project finance manager. She shared that when she reached a senior position in a workplace with few other senior women, she had asked herself why she made it in a time when few other had. She argued that she found it helpful to present a clear number-led case when advocating for change. She suggested getting data about gender pay and employment in a company, and presenting metrics to leaders,

approaching it like a business case with reference to how change can lead to a company making more money.

She said that women are trying to sort this out, but it's about a larger culture change which requires a wider collaborative effort.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin Invited Laura to reply to questions and comments made by Suzanne and Ellie.

Laura Bates

Bates emphasised how the solution is for organisations to take responsibility rather than individuals. She argued undue individual responsibility was placed on women through extreme pressure on women's networks and women sent to assertiveness courses, instead of demanding systemic support. She argued a flaw in individual responsibility is that when just one woman raises an issue, it is easy for them to be scapegoated or dismissed as whiney and complaining, but when women come together, with male allies too, it tends to be taken more seriously.

She also advocated for keeping notes of behaviour that might be brushed off as minor or banter. She argued that this can help people present a more comprehensive case for action or change.

Zelda Perkins

Perkins shared her agreement with Laura, and emphasised the problem of when all the pressure is put on the victim.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin agreed that the idea women should change, for example changing the way they dress, is a difficult concept.

Claire Reindorp

Reindorp noted that salary transparency and advertising flexible working on adverts helps a lot for young women in the workplace. She argued that managers can be the ones who block or uplift young talent and noted a report from CMI around training which showed 82% of new managers in the UK are what can be called 'accidental managers,' who have landed into management roles. She pointed out that those managers who have been trained are more likely to call out bad behaviour. She suggested better management training, including being trained on how to pick-up low-level sexism and support the development of a young woman, is a practical solution.

She emphasised the issue of the sticky floor as a problem facing young women, and cited an American study which described the 'sticky floor' or 'broken run' as the biggest problem facing young women in the work force. She emphasised the business case for tackling this to help young women, but also improve talent pipelines.

Emily Kimberlin

Kimberlin recalled the time she was the only women in the estimation department at her workplace, where she was not an 'estimator' but an assistant. She said she was told by others in her company that the reason that she had not been promoted in the department was her attitude. She felt navigating this involved patience and picking battles and was eventually promoted.

She advised women to ask for what they needed to do to be promoted in writing, as this can sometimes show that they are already doing their job properly and are worthy of promotion.

Zelda Perkins

Perkins noted that through her work it is now prohibited for universities to use NDAs in relation to discrimination and misconduct. She shared how she is now doing the same with businesses and corporations with a voluntary public pledge. She emphasised that NDAs disproportionately effect women and people of colour.

She emphasised the importance of data, particularly in a predominantly male environment, as it speaks directly to the people in power. She noted that data shows these changes and pledges are good for business and encouraged people to use data in their arguments and reemphasised her call for businesses to sign the pledge, even if it is just to start a conversation.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin Invited further questions.

Participant: Elaine Barker

Barker introduced herself as a 40-year-old who works in law. She said the solution involves not only women coming together to discuss things, sharing information on potential sexual predators in business and collaborating, but also giving younger people the tools to navigate these issues and situations.

Participant: Jo

Jo talked about a programme at her work for women to navigate the culture instead of having women change themselves. She shared that in a 5-year period 48% of women have grown within their role with help from this and thanked senior men who made efforts to attend their events.

She recommended minimum apprenticeship levels for highly gendered industries, asking if there was a way to look at the minimum number of female students for construction apprenticeships. She shared that when she talks to students about apprenticeships the interest in different sectors is still highly gendered.

Participant

Introduced the topic of work insecurity and its effect on women, suggesting limiting of the use of zero hours contracts to address the power imbalance between employer and employer.

Zelda Perkins and Participant: Suzanne

Perkins emphasised that if NDAs for harassment aren't gone it will be difficult to change the culture.

Suzanne suggested that instead of banning NDAs, you can say there are no sanctions for breaching an NDA for a certain reason.

Perkins said this had been looked into, but the NDAs themselves are the problem.

Suzanne said that for quicker results, if there's an exclusion for breaking certain types of NDAs, a middle ground could be found.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin asks if anyone has any last comments or questions.

Participant

A participant who stated she worked in property emphasised her desire to end the meeting on a positive note. She talked about the blatant sexism she faced 40 years ago at the start of her career, like being told she went into the industry to meet husband or that her pregnancy was a breach of contract. She said that things have improved and the key to further improvements was culture change, which will happen as younger people enter the work force.

Baroness Uddin

Uddin emphasised the positive message, and the celebration of changes that have already taken place.

She thanked everyone and closed the meeting.