

Safe Respectful & Inclusive Workplaces: Stakeholders & Strategies

Organized by:

The Centre for Research and Education on
Violence against Women and Children

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Location:

London Convention Centre
London, Ontario

Opening Plenary:

The Personal Costs of Unsafe, Disrespectful & Harassing Workplace Behaviour

Panel Members (in order of speaking appearance):

- Yvonne Seguin
- Bonnie Robichaud
- Sharon Scrimshaw (Chatman)
- Hazel Magnussen

Moderated by:

Michelle Schryer

Opening Plenary:

Personal costs of unsafe, disrespectful and harassing behaviour. I can't think of a more fitting or meaningful plenary to open this conference with, and we are fortunate indeed to have this very formidable panel with us this morning.

It doesn't seem possible that ten and a half years have passed since the first-ever-in-Canada, inter-sectoral conference on workplace harassment and violence was held right here in London. *The Way Forward: Rethinking the Problem of Workplace Sexual Harassment* was a thoughtful, pro-active response to the workplace murder of Theresa Vince, who as you know, was killed on June 2, 1996, by her immediate supervisor who had sexually harassed her on the job for years.

At that time there was little availability of resources or information regarding gendered workplace harassment & violence. Truth be known we are still terribly under-resourced in this area. There was, and still is an unfortunate lack in support, counseling and legal services for victims of workplace harassment & violence, and precious few sources for referral. There were no step-by-step instruction manuals to assist victims, unions, front-line workers or advocates, employers, third parties or others.

Having said that, it was a widely known fact that employers were ultimately responsible for providing a safe and poison-free work environment for employees. The Human Rights Commission provided written material in this regard, and when requested, would attend venues such as worksites to help with additional information and assistance. Despite that, the Theresa Vince inquest revealed systemic flaws and inadequacies in Human Rights legislation as well as Occupational Health and Safety laws.

In Ontario tremendous efforts have been made over the last thirteen years in an attempt to advance safe, respectful, poison-free work environments... to raise consciousness and awareness... to reform and improve legislation that affects workers... to provide solid and meaningful research... to increase knowledge and resources. Often in this work there are personal costs associated and in some of the other provinces the work started earlier.

No matter where or when, the personal costs of *unsafe, disrespectful and harassing behaviour* cannot be underestimated or emphasized enough.

Panelists on today's opening plenary and many others in this room have really been the trailblazers in this crucially important work. Not only will you hear from them throughout this conference, but several were here ten and a half years ago at *The Way Forward: Rethinking the Problem of Workplace Sexual Harassment*... charting a course for action, education and change. In fact, it was then that I had the honour of meeting our first two speakers, Yvonne and Bonnie. I think Sharon and I had met even before then, and I only recently had the pleasure of meeting Hazel in a telephone meeting.

The inquest into Theresa's murder; *The Way Forward* conference, and numerous other activities and initiatives set the stage and laid a good and strong foundation for this conference that we are gathered at today. This serves as a much needed follow-up to *The Way Forward* and I am grateful to the organizers and in particular, Barb MacQuarrie who was at the heart of both conferences.

Painfully, this event follows another needless tragedy, the murder of Nurse Lori Dupont, also killed on the job. Lori was killed on November 12, 2005 at the hands of a physician with whom she worked, and with whom she had previously ended an intimate relationship. *Personal costs of unsafe, disrespectful and harassing behaviour*. Needless to say, the inquest into Lori's murder also assisted a great deal in helping to build a solid framework for this conference.

It has been my great privilege to work in close partnership with the families of both Theresa and Lori. My relationship with them and with so many others who are all too familiar with the tolls of *unsafe, disrespectful and harassing behaviour* has given me a profoundly deep and unique perspective on this subject.

I feel certain that when you leave this plenary you will have a new or perhaps renewed awareness and sensitivity to this issue, and I am pleased to introduce our first speaker now.

Yvonne Seguin:

As I mentioned, I first met Yvonne Seguin at *The Way Forward* conference in 1998 here in London. We were on a plenary together and I remember well the impression that Yvonne left me with. She absolutely exuded passion and compassion, energy and confidence, and she spoke with complete conviction. I was glad that she spoke after me because she would have been a very hard act to follow!

In the 1970's, Yvonne, a victim of workplace sexual harassment learned the hard way that she was on her own to deal with the harassment she was experiencing. After knocking on many doors, Yvonne quickly came to realize that there was no help available for people going through such ordeals. A true advocate, Yvonne, on her own volition, formed a committee to help womyn, who, like her, were on their own to face sexual harassment.

The Committee was set up in 1980 and as the saying goes, "If you build it, they will come". So it didn't take long for Yvonne to learn the gravity of sexual harassment that was occurring, and the lack of resources for victims. So, with the help of colleagues and friends, she dove in head first and by 1984 the organization that she built from the ground – up was incorporated!

The Help and Information Centre on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail (GAIHST)) has become an invaluable resource not only in Quebec, but here in Ontario as well!

Yvonne has co-authored and co-created a number of resources including books and films. We have *It's Not Part of the Job* at the Crisis Centre and I know it is a well-used resource.

Today, Yvonne is the Director of the Help and Information Centre on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (GAIHST), a non-profit community centre in Quebec that specializes exclusively in sexual and psychological harassment in the workplace. She is undoubtedly a trailblazer and you can read more about her in the bios contained in your package. It's a pleasure to introduce Yvonne Seguin.

Bonnie Robichaud:

There can be no denying that Bonnie Robichaud is another of those true trailblazers, and if I hadn't known that before I heard her speak at *The Way Forward* conference, I surely would have known it afterwards. I recall being impressed by her feistiness and sheer determination, and it became clear to me that Bonnie Robichaud was one of the womyn on whose shoulders I stand on in this work.

In 1996 Bonnie's publication *A Guide to Fighting Workplace Sexual Harassment / Assault* had its second printing.

Bonnie was a lead hand cleaner at the Air Defence Command Base in North Bay when she filed a complaint of sexual harassment against her supervisor and her employer in 1980. Over the years that followed Ms. Robichaud continued to speak up against the harassment that she endured. The reprisals were serious:

- She faced a \$30,000 law suit for slander.
- Her employer drafted a petition against her.
- She endured a hostile work environment where she was shunned by her co-workers.
- She was suspended without pay (and I am delighted to say that she was subsequently re-instated with back pay!), and,
- She was required to submit to a lie detector test and a psychiatric assessment.

Bonnie fought the sexual harassment through: grievance procedures; complaints with the Public Service Commission; complaints to Members of Parliament; a claim with the Ontario Worker's Compensation Board, and a complaint of discrimination on the basis of sex with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. It took seven years for Bonnie's case to reach the Supreme Court of Canada and then to be returned to the Review Tribunal for damages.

Most importantly, Bonne attained her goal to ensure for others, freedom from harassment in the workplace. Bonnie's complaint against the Department of National Defense was responsible for the landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada on employer liability for a harassment free workplace.

Only an employer can remedy undesirable effects and only an employer can provide the most important remedy... a healthy work environment!

And I have to say on all our behalf Bonnie... Thank you!

Sharon Scrimshaw:

Some of you may know her as Sharon Chatman. Now Sharon Scrimshaw, she is someone that I have a very deep appreciation for. We have had the opportunity to work together a few times over the years to raise awareness, draw attention to the horrible realities that face victims of gendered workplace harassment and violence, and work towards solutions.

Sharon has a quiet strength about her that I so admire. She uses it well and I wish I could learn her technique! She has the ability to touch people in a way that changes them and I know this because recently I was speaking with someone who heard Sharon speak several years ago and he asked me if I was still in touch with her. He and his partner had both heard Sharon speak and he told me that her presentation really opened their eyes and that they both saw things a bit differently after that. That's pretty powerful stuff I would say!

Shortly after Sharon completed high school she began working at 3M Canada Inc., something that arguably should have been wonderful and exciting for her. She was very involved in her union... the Canadian Auto Workers and even became a Union Rep. which fit in nicely with her particular interest in Equal Rights and Health and Safety. But 3M is where Sharon learned the true meaning of sexual harassment and the high cost it has on everyone. And if you have ever seen the training video from *The Way Forward* you would have some familiarity with Sharon's experience.

Since coming forward with her own experience, Sharon has become a source of support, strength and assistance for other women throughout the province. She has traveled to many parts of Ontario talking to women, providing accompaniment and advocacy for them... giving voice to experience, and offering any assistance she can. And in the absence of adequate resources to do this work, Sharon has generously done so in a volunteer capacity.

And on top of all that, she's a rockin' good grandmother!

Hazel Magnussen:

Hazel Magnussen's participation here today is especially timely for Ontario, as it follows the Nurse Lori Dupont inquest where the issue of disruptive physician behaviour was certainly raised.

From our Ontario experience we know that several women have been murdered in our province after experiencing gendered workplace harassment, at the hands of the men who harassed them, and we have had public inquests into two of those murders.

The personal tragedy that Hazel will speak to, and that she has authored a book about, *A Doctor's Calling: A matter of conscience*, sheds another light about *personal costs of unsafe, disrespectful and harassing behaviour*. I haven't had the opportunity to read her book just yet, but I have it now and hope to have that chance soon.

In addition to the book, Hazel has authored numerous publications and articles, far too numerous to name since 2002, and has made several public appearances.

Hazel Magnussen, the younger sister of the victim, worked as a nurse in a variety of health care settings over a period of 35 years. Conscious of the moral issues faced by health professionals, she undertook further study in theology and ethics in the eighties. Now retired, Hazel continues to advocate for reform in matters pertaining to bullying and disruptive behavior in the workplace, and the needs of victims of crime in the criminal justice process. Originally from Alberta, Hazel now lives on Vancouver Island with her husband, Lloyd.

A 2008 Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) resolution urging our governments to pass legislation regarding bullying and psychological harassment

was lead by Hazel and her local club. Its acceptance at the 2008 annual meeting enabled the CFUW in Ontario to support Bill 168 – *An Amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act* to include violence and harassment in the workplace, and which passed first reading on April 20th.

Hazel is currently part of a working group hoping to see similar legislation passed in British Columbia. I hope you will take some time to check her bio our for yourself because there is much more to be said about Hazel Magnussen.

Closing Comments:

As you can tell, we could easily hold a full-day conference with each one of our speakers. They all have a wealth of knowledge and insight learned from lived experience and lessons gained on so many levels and in many different systems and structures.

It's unfortunate that time doesn't allow for a question and answer period but with the opportunity to hear from such trailblazers I think that our time was well used, and certainly over the course of the next two days there will be chances here and there to connect so, if you have your chance, be sure to take it!

Thanks so much to Hazel, Yvonne and Bonnie for traveling such a long way to be with us at this very important conference. Thanks to them and Sharon for being here today, for imparting their learned wisdom, for sharing deeply personal experience and struggle, and also for looking at accomplishments that have been made along the way... accomplishments that would not have been made without them and would not have been made without Theresa Vince and her family, Lori Dupont and her family, and so many of you here today.

Thank you.