

# editor's letter



In our What Women Want Forum, *Marie Claire* readers voted for sexual harassment at work as their topmost concern. We were all a bit taken aback to realise that this is such a serious and frequent problem for women of all ages. Everyone knows that sexual harassment is about power. To be precise, the abuse of power. But its insidious purpose is to blur the boundary between the brains and efficiency of a woman and her looks, and to convert everything she has into an object of sexual lust. It crudely reminds women that their bodies are more valued than their competence. How else can one understand this crime? Doesn't a woman's lack of reciprocation disempower and discredit an educated man? And sex? What kind of fulfilment is there, in say, stopping a lift and groping at a colleague's breasts or referring to her body parts repeatedly in conversations at office? A woman whose family circumstances did not allow her to quit her job despite sexual abuse by her boss confides: "He forced me to part my legs, but he could never make love to me."

Not to mention that sexual harassment does not only damage the respect of the victim. It makes everyone else in the office feel like a loser. Eventually it is every

**Sexual harassment aims to blur to boundary between the brains and efficiency of a woman and her looks, and to convert all she has into an object of sexual lust**

boss's dead loss.

I must bring in the controversial other side to this issue. Sexual harassment is not just a man-against-woman thing. Some women choose to become active collaborators in their own disempowerment. As actor Khushboo, our ambassador for this cause, says, some women will throw themselves at men in power, trading physical favours for professional gains. Others will go the whole hog – misuse power to sexually harass men.

While the only way to beat the beasts at their own game is to become powerful, the world will not become a better place if women become 'like men'. If we imitate our violators in our tryst with power, we will end up with the 'same difference'.

Overthrow your abuser to protect your dignity at all costs. But that strength of will must be complemented by refusing to misuse power when you have its luxury. Otherwise, the chase for the kill will kill you. No freedom may then be worth it.

P.S. Of the many, many letters that came after our first anniversary issue, including one accusing me of becoming sentimental and another of looking like Rani Mukerji, two cryptic lines held my attention. "I didn't like the June edition. There was so much documentary about people. Why didn't you add a lot of beauty tips?"

Serves us right.

  
Shefalee Vasudev,  
Editor