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Cindy Gallop's two steps to end sexual harassment, abuse and bullying in adland



By Jason Pollock | 4 June 2024

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Advertising consultant Cindy Gallop says there are two "simple, practical steps" that would end sexual harassment, abuse and bullying in the advertising industry.

"The first step is to ensure that every level of your company, especially the senior levels, and therefore your entire workplace, is gender-equal or ideally, more female than male," Gallop told *AdNews*.

"It's ironic that an industry whose primary target is women is so dominated by men."

The latest *Create Space* census shows that the industry is still 56% male-dominated in the C-Suite, although females in C-Suite/exec management roles has increased by 6 percentage points to 54% in 2023.

Almost a quarter (23%) of female respondents and 29% of gender non-conforming people said they had experienced gender-based discrimination, compared to 6% of males.

While sexual harassment figures dropped from 6% to 5% overall, and from 8% to 6% for females, 26% of females say they have been bullied, undermined or harassed in some way at work in the last 12 months, compared to 18% of males - no improvement since 2021.

"Sexual harassment magically disappears in working environments that are gender-equal/female-dominated, because a) men are no longer surrounded by the bro culture that implicitly indicates it's OK to behave like that, and b) when men interact every day with women all around them on an equal professional footing and are constantly exposed to those women's talents, skills, insights and contributions, men cease to see women in one of only two roles: girlfriend or secretary," Gallop said.

Back in 2022, pitch consultancy TrinityP3 and its CEO Darren Woolley announced it would be requesting that any agency wanting to be considered for a pitch complete a statutory declaration of their status and processes regarding workplace bullying, harassment and assault.

Gallop, the founder of MakeLoveNotPorn and a long-time campaigner for equality across the industry, said the reason gender equality isn't happening is because it requires men to hire, promote and value brilliant women they feel threatened by.

"The single biggest barrier to gender equality in our industry is insecure men," she said.

"The second step is to publicly announce that a key part of your corporate values is good sexual values, and good sexual behaviour. Add it to your list of brand/corporate values. Write it into your corporate mission statement. Include it in your employee on-boarding manual. State it and restate it at every employee town hall.

"Make it crystal clear that you expect every employee to demonstrate good sexual values, as much as you expect them to demonstrate all the other values of the company that you talk about openly. White male corporate leaders don't want to do this, because they themselves are the ones not demonstrating good sexual values."

Gallop said that she doesn't believe that the workplace culture in the advertising industry has changed for the better in recent years - despite some seeing progress made around diversity, equity and inclusion - because at the top of the industry is "a closed loop of white guys talking to white guys about other white guys".

"Those white guys are sitting very pretty, with their huge salaries, gigantic bonuses, big pools of stock options, lavish expense accounts. Why on earth would they ever want to rock the boat?" she told *AdNews*.

The *Create Space* census revealed that the industry remains 86% dominated by the ethnic majority (Anglo-Celtic, European, and North American), with more diversity at junior levels. Those in the ethnic minority audience have much lower feelings of inclusion and belonging, and their experience of discrimination has increased, leading them to want to leave the industry.



Cindy Gallop.

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"Oh, they have to talk gender equality and diversity; they have to appoint Chief Diversity Officers; have diversity initiatives; say the word diversity a lot, especially in public. Deep down they have no intention of changing a thing, because the system is working just fine for them as it currently is," she said.

"It's like the old joke about the lightbulb. How many therapists does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one, but the lightbulb has to really want to change. In our industry, the lightbulb does not really want to change."

Nine Entertainment recently launched an [external review of its newsroom culture](#) following allegations of abuse of power and "drunken, lecherous behaviour".

Fellow broadcaster Seven has also been in the crosshairs for "paying for illicit drugs and sex workers for Bruce Lehmann in order to secure an exclusive interview", [as per the ABC](#).

Gallop summed up the scandals at the networks in one word: "Out-bloody-rageous."

"The first instinct of the men at the top is to bury such incidents, not clean house. That is appallingly the case everywhere," she said.

"Two things change this. The first is legislation - a number of states here in the US have banned NDAs in the case of sexual misconduct. [The Australian legal system especially needs updating in this regard](#), given the ease with which sexual harassers can sue their victims.

"The second is outstanding investigative journalism that enables media exposes - in Australia, hampered by the first. I look forward to [AdNews](#) doing everything it can to expose the systemic sexual misconduct in our industry."

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