

Lack of control,
apathy, and the
mundane in
"orientation"



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In a world run by major corporations, it is not uncommon to find one's self in a position of very little control, even over one's own life. This feeling caused by lack of power and the other grieves of life sometimes brings about a feeling of apathy regarding things that does not directly affect or relate to one's self. These factors of life present themselves frequently throughout Daniel Orozco's "Orientation," a cynical but witty story that illustrates the rules and circumstances that an office's employees are subjected to that reflect the company's values and the ways that people cope with dissatisfaction. Orozco's social commentary addresses the apathy with which people view events and actions that do not affect them as well as the lack of control that they truly have over their own lives.

Throughout "Orientation," the text presents a pressing feeling that, within the office, there is a complete lack of control among the lives of the workers. From the beginning of the narrator's instructions up till the last punctuation mark, the new employee that is being addressed appears to have more and more of his/her basic rights as a human diminished. The first illustration of this is the narrator's instruction on phone use: each cubicle contains a telephone, with which the employees are not allowed to make personal calls. While this restriction is not uncommon in workplaces, what follows is far more ludicrous: "If you must make an emergency phone call, ask your supervisor first... [otherwise], you may be let go" (Orozco, 506). So, in this office, if one was to need immediate medical attention, for example, an employee's safety may depend on this rule. Given that one would be required to seek out and explain the situation to a supervisor, the time it takes to do so may make it too late to address said emergency. The

company appears to emphasize the importance of the workers' hierarchy and the security of the job above the safety of its employees, thereby stripping them of any control over their situations.

It is also suggested that an employee's time with the company consists largely of being surrounded by privileges that are forever just out of reach. The narrator makes a point to tell the new employee of the several utilities around the office that are available but that he/she may not access. The narrator explains the coffee situation then adds that " You are allowed to join the coffee pool of your choice, but you are not allowed to touch the Mr. Coffee" (507). The narrator also points out the Custodian's Closet and promptly adds that " You have no business [there]" (508), and informs that there is a phone in each cubicle but one must never answer it. The narrator, through the company's belittling rules, is illustrating the complete lack of power that the employees have by pointing out average privileges that are not given to them.

Among the employees of this workplace, a sense of apathy is emitted that appears to be cultivated by their personal demons. The text suggests that what goes on in the workplace is of the utmost importance; what happens outside of the workers' cubicles is irrelevant. The workers are apathetic toward Barry Hacker's tendency to steal food from the refrigerator because " his petty theft is an outlet for his grief" (508), and they are willing to look the other way when John LaFontaine " forays into the forbidden territory of the women's room [because it is] simply a benign thrill, a faint blip in the dull flat line of his life" (506). The employees are even apathetic toward more serious matters: There are multiple occasions throughout " Orientation" in which the <https://assignbuster.com/lack-of-control-apaty-and-the-mundane-in-orientation/>

deaths of employees' loved ones are described then abruptly shifted to financial/work-related problems rather than emotional ones. The narrator begins each of these descriptions with the impression of sympathy, then informs in a way that is supposed to be comforting that, upon these horrific events, any costs will be covered by the company: " Larry Bagdikian would not have to pay one dime. He would have nothing to worry about." (508). These descriptions suggest that the importance of the financial loss brought about by his daughters' brutal deaths is more important than the tragedy itself, which illustrates the emphasis that the company and its employees place on work-related consequences rather than personal ones as well as the apathy with which the company views the private lives of its employees.

An even more disturbing illustration of this company value is the accuracy and detail with which the employees know of Kevin Howard's hobby. The narrator introduces Kevin matter-of-factly as a serial killer and then proceeds to describe with alarming precision the credentials of his victims and exactly how he murders them. How the narrator comes across this information with such certainty is not mentioned, but the text suggests that all of the office knows what the horrible details that the narrator describes. Since Kevin does not inflict any harm on the employees of the office, however, they seem to think that they have nothing to worry about and that as long as he can continue to work, this information is extraneous. " Kevin Howard does not let any of this interfere with his work. He is, in fact, our fastest typist" (509). The fact that the other employees are so willing to brush his secrets to the side illustrates not only the apathy with which they regard each other's personal lives but, more importantly, the ease with which they can care so little about

what does not directly regard them. As long as the employee can carry out the work required of him/her, anything else they do has very little matter.

Humans frequently settle upon unhealthy ways to cope with grief or general dissatisfaction with their situation, and because of these misfortunes that life delivers, people sometimes find it appropriate to turn the other cheek when they notice something that ordinarily should be addressed. This appears to be a prominent theme throughout Daniel Orozco's "Orientation", as well as the frequent feeling of apathy that is cultivated through malcontent.

Orozco's cynical reflection of society addresses the apathy with which people view events and actions that do not affect them as well as the lack of control that they have over their own lives.