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The #MeToo Movement

Even Women Who Can't Say #MeToo Have Been Negatively Impacted by Predatory Culture

BY KATHLEEN WU

THE #METOO MOVEMENT HAS OPENED the floodgates of women (and some men) telling their own stories of sexual harassment and assault, both in the workplace and out. Like most catharses, it was a long time coming.

For those who have harbored shame or guilt over their own Harvey Weinstein-like encounters, the recent flood of stories from victims, both famous and non-famous, has to be somewhat comforting. Whether any of this will lead to real change is, of course, an open question. There is reason to be cynical, given the recent promotion and/or tolerance of alleged and even admitted sexual predators, but one can always hope.

MANY WOMEN, EVEN IF THEY HAVEN'T BEEN HARASSED OR ASSAULTED, KNOW THAT THEY ARE MOST LIKELY MISSING OUT ON OPPORTUNITIES SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN.

Even for women who haven't been harassed or assaulted (which



SIPHOTOGRAPHY

I am fortunate enough to be), there is a price to be paid for a culture that denigrates and objectifies

women. Many women, even if they haven't been harassed or

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assaulted, know that they are most likely missing out on opportunities simply because they are women.

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The legal profession is based on personal relationships. Most relationships require at least occasional face-to-face interaction. In many cases, those interactions are during golf or at sporting events. In others, they're over drinks, dinners and, as we learned in the Weinstein case, at hotels. I'm sure there are plenty of lawyers who still entertain clients at strip clubs.

To a greater or lesser extent, many women don't feel welcome or comfortable in those venues.

IF THE #METOO MOVEMENT DOES NOTHING ELSE, IT MAY HELP MEN REALIZE THAT WOMEN FACE CHALLENGES MEN NEVER EVEN HAVE TO THINK ABOUT.

Certainly, many women love playing golf and attending football games, but there's no denying that those outings weren't originally conceived to be gender-inclusive. As for one-on-ones over dinner, drinks or at hotels, many women might be reluctant to agree to or invite a male client to meet in such a setting, for fear the client might get the wrong idea. At the very least, the potential intimacy of the setting can set off alarm bells for women leery of being hit on.

As for entertaining at strip clubs, that's not a gray area. There might as well be a "No Gurls Allowed" sign.

My point is, even if a woman hasn't felt the sting of assault or harassment, the air we breathe is thick with it. And it can have a chilling effect on women's business development efforts. It can hinder our ability to nurture relationships with colleagues and clients of the opposite sex—both of which can have a direct effect on our career advancement.

Can women overcome these barriers? Of course we can. We've been dancing backward and in high

heels for decades. But it's another barrier we simply don't need. And it's a barrier our male colleagues don't have to overcome. Just as important, it's a barrier many of our male colleagues don't even know exists for women (which is also part of the problem).

Of course, business development initiatives don't have to be gender-specific, and many firms hold group business development events (retreats, theater or concert outings, happy hours, etc.). But, there's no denying that there's a place for one-on-ones, whether it's with other lawyers or with

clients and prospective clients. But some women may be uncomfortable in those settings if a firm's or a company's culture tolerates, and even protects, sexual predators.

If the #MeToo movement does nothing else, it may help men realize that women face challenges men never even have to think about. And those men should know that they are crucial players in the effort to improve the workplace for their female colleagues.

If they have behaved inappropriately themselves, they should now be under no illusions about the impact of their actions. If they have behaved appropriately but were silent when their male colleagues denigrated or harassed female coworkers, perhaps they will now be moved to speak up.

A social media hashtag isn't going to change behavior, but if it helps turn up the volume on a conversation that has until recently been in coded whispers, it's been a good use of our digital currency. ■



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