

castes” of groups like Hispanics or Asians, or structural issues of economic inequality, operating more comfortably in a binary of Black and white. That said, she does operate well in this binary. However, after arguing that caste has seemingly all of society in its grip and that it structures much of our worldview, her prescription for dismantling it is individual acts of connection. Wilkerson writes that “each time a person reaches across caste and makes a connection, it helps break the back of caste. Multiplied by millions in a given day, it becomes the flap of a butterfly wing that shifts the air and builds to a hurricane across the ocean”. This is a surprising turn of vague optimism given her bleak outlook of relative immutability as it leaves the deeper problems of structural racism, such as the large wealth gap between Black and white families or the disparity in incarceration rates, unresolved. Ultimately, this unexpected optimism causes her cumulative argument to stop short of any concrete call to action for a systemic structural reckoning.

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BOOK REVIEW

Confronting Sexual Harassment in the Corporate Workforce

#Me Too in the Corporate World, by Sylvia Anne Hewlett (HarperCollins, 2020)

Reviewed by Lauren Sanford

This is a powerful study about the history of sexual assault in the workplace and how companies can move forward to create a safer and more inclusive work environment. While the #MeToo movement of the past has largely focused on victims who were white women, author Sylvia Ann Hewlett wants this movement to include men, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Not only are sexual harassment and assault scarring for the victims, but companies themselves can suffer from hits to the talent pipeline, the bottom line and can result in top executives being nervous to hire young women.

The author herself was a victim of sexual assault at the beginning of her career. She reveals how news of the incident spread quickly throughout her office, and Hewlett’s coworkers distanced themselves from her to avoid any involvement in the situation. This prolonged harassment and isolation made it exceedingly difficult for her to do her job, forcing her to quit. Flash forward to October of 2017, and Hewlett was a speaker at a conference for women on sexual harassment. This occurred at the time the Uber scandal was unraveling, and it was here that Hewlett gathered her courage to share her experiences. Ultimately, the support she received from others inspired her to write this book and conduct research to help the #MeToo movement have a larger impact.¹

Despite the topic of sexual harassment and assault being a very personal one for Hewlett, her arguments are not swayed by her emotions and instead rely heavily on research. Hewlett is not only an economist but is the CEO of Hewlett Consulting Partners and founder of the Center for Talent Innovation. She is a Cambridge University graduate with a PhD from the University of London, and has written 14 books, including *The Sponsor Effect and Executive Presence*.²

Her latest book is extremely relevant in today’s work environment. Not only is it an important read for victims of workplace assault to feel less alone, but it’s crucial for employees to understand what is and is not acceptable at work. Furthermore, Hewlett wants top

managers and executives to understand how their companies can be impacted by sexual misconduct and what steps they can take to prevent future misconduct. The book first details the findings of Hewlett’s research, including groups who are more likely to be victims as well as those more likely to be attackers. She then explains how these incidents can impact the company and finishes with action steps both individuals and companies can take.

It is no secret that the #MeToo movement is a hot topic right now. But its wide publicity over recent years has not evolved from thin air and is rather the consequence of a long chain of events related to gender discrimination in the workplace. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed gender discrimination, but did not explicitly ban sexual harassment. Technically, the term “sexual harassment” did not even exist until the 1970s. Since then, the world has seen the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal unfold and learned how victims are often shamed while predators receive little more than a slap on the wrist. Additionally, in 2002 news broke of the molestation of children at the hands of Catholic priests, and even more recently in 2017 Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual misconduct by 87 women.³

These various incidents and many others have resulted in a lot of positive change. Victims have found the courage to come forward and share their experiences, societal attitudes in terms of believing victims have changed drastically, and companies are starting to come clean in terms of misconduct in their offices. However, a major issue that Hewlett points out is the image associated with sexual harassment and sexual assault victims. Usually, people picture victims as young white women, and while there are many victims who fit this description, this view ignores thousands of others. And when people do not feel represented in any given movement, they are more likely to feel that they do not belong and therefore do not speak up.⁴

Hewlett brings attention to those who have too long been overlooked in popular accounts of #MeToo and explains which

groups are most at risk. As the founder of the Center for Talent Innovation, she was heavily involved in a survey of 3,213 college-educated employees between twenty-one and sixty-five years old employed full-time in white-collar positions. This research breaks down the percentages of female and male employees who were sexually harassed at work, sexually assaulted at work, if they were harassed or assaulted by a man or a woman, and if they were harassed or assaulted by someone junior or senior to them. Hewlett also analyzed the race of those who were sexually harassed or assaulted, the percentages of those in the LGBTQ+ community who were harassed or assaulted, and the job satisfaction of an employee depending on how sexual harassment and assault personally impacts them in the workplace.⁵

The findings show that 34% of female employees and 13% of male employees have been sexually harassed at work, and 7% of female employees and 5% of male employees have been sexually assaulted at work.⁶ While the breakdown of employees who were harassed fits into preconceived ideas of how women are at higher risk of misconduct, the fact that men are only two percentage points below women in terms of experiencing sexual assault at work is alarming. Men are often not included in the #MeToo movement as victims, and this startling statistic sets up Hewlett's later discussion of how men are sometimes hesitant to speak out about their experiences. This may be due to a variety of factors including the pressures of toxic masculinity and the fear that they may be laughed at by their peers if they were assaulted by a woman.⁷ Moreover, Hewlett found that 37% of both white women and Latinas in the study were harassed by a coworker, and Asian and African American women did not fall far behind at 23% and 25% respectively. Yet 7% of the African American women surveyed and 6% of the women in each of the other categories were victims of sexual assault.

For the men, 21% of African American men studied and 13% of the men in the other categories were sexually harassed at work, and 7% of African American men and Latinos, 6% of Asian men, and 4% of white men were sexually assaulted at work.⁸ This breakdown highlights the fact that, for both men and women, it is not just white individuals who are at risk. In terms of the LGBTQ+ men and women studied, both groups experienced higher rates of sexual harassment and sexual assault than those who identified as heterosexual.⁹ Clearly this community needs to be included far more in discussions about workplace misconduct.

By breaking down these findings and identifying those groups that are more at risk than others, Hewlett makes a strong case for why the #MeToo movement needs to be more inclusive. But this diversity does not only extend to victims of sexual misconduct. Another main component of Hewlett's book is about predators and their motivation. Ultimately, a main motivator in both sexual harassment and sexual assault is the power and privilege of the attacker over the victim. This means misconduct is often committed by someone senior to the victim and thus offenses are more likely to be committed by upper-level managers and executives. But

similar to Hewlett's first main point that anyone can be a victim of sexual misconduct, anyone can be a predator as well. Because acts of misconduct are largely power-driven, people of all races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations can be attackers. Yet society does not view women harassing men as seriously as men harassing women, so merely viewing women as harmless victims reinforces stereotypes that are not necessarily correct.¹⁰ Hewlett's research found that, of women who have been sexually harassed, 97% were harassed by men and 13% by women. For the men, 57% have been harassed by other men and 68% by women. In the case of sexual assault, 94% of women who were assaulted had male attackers and 19% had female attackers. For men, 38% of those who were assaulted had male attackers and 76% had female attackers.¹¹ In each of these instances, there was a greater chance that the victim was attacked by someone of the opposite gender, emphasizing Hewlett's point that sexual misconduct in the workplace can come from anyone.

The latter portion of *#Me Too in the Corporate World* focuses on what companies can do to eliminate the chance of sexual misconduct happening in their organization and what impacts that misconduct can have on the company. Her objective here is to stress to business owners and executives that when sexual harassment and sexual assault occur, there are more consequences than damage to the brand image and its market valuation. Not only can it be expensive to deal with thanks to lawyer fees and settlements, but the company can also lose talented employees fleeing a hostile workplace, key leaders who are accused harassers, and strong job candidates repelled by the company's bad reputation.¹² In explaining these points, it becomes clear that it makes much more sense for companies to try and prevent all forms of misconduct rather than merely cover it up.

Hewlett offers several suggestions for how to eradicate misconduct from the workplace. Training at work should be focused on education about misconduct, but also teaching employees how one can step up as a witness and bystander. By updating reporting and response systems, firms can better ensure confidentiality of the victims and share reports of repeated misconduct with top managers to remove dangerous employees from the company.¹³ Furthermore, the company should take a strong public stance against misconduct and reflect this in their corporate values to encourage employees to avoid these actions.¹⁴

Overall, Hewlett does an excellent job of educating her readers about a variety of topics within the realm of sexual misconduct at work and making the #MeToo movement more inclusive. Even so, there are a few areas of the book that raise some questions. When the author introduces the research conducted through the Center for Talent Innovation, she does not give the breakdown of the 3,213 individuals on a variety of factors. The reader is not told how many of those studied were men, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, younger employees, more senior employees, nor the race and ethnicity of the individuals. Thus, when a percentage is given as to how these individuals responded, the

reader does not know how large of a group that percentage actually applies to. Similarly, there's no mention how these individuals were chosen beyond being college-educated, between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-five, and full-time white-collar workers. It is unclear if these individuals knew each other and if they were highly concentrated in one industry or geographic area, raising questions of whether the research findings can apply to the workforce as a whole or only to a specific industry or city. The research is also vulnerable to criticism for taking a highly heteronormative stance, meaning that most of the survey questions define the individuals as only either male or female. Aside from the single question about LGBTQ+ individuals, the rest of the research excludes this entire group which is alarming given their high rates of experiencing sexual misconduct.

Even with these critiques, I think that Hewlett has still produced a compelling study that deserves to be widely read. Her intended audience is broad: the first part aims for everyone in the #MeToo movement with its narrative, but is also important for all employees to read to better understand the risks they face at work. Hewlett's message to management and top executives in the latter portion of the book has a lofty goal of trying to eliminate misconduct altogether, but she provides many steps and ideas that are relatively simple for companies to internalize and apply to their daily operations.

In short, *#Me Too in the Corporate World* is a study well worth reading by employees and employers in all industries. Not only is it crucial to understand the history of the #MeToo movement given its substantial media coverage, but it is important that individuals like Hewlett are expanding upon the movement. For her, #MeToo is an ever-evolving narrative, and predators, like victims, can be anyone. Harassment and assault happen to individuals of all gender identifications and ethnicities, and this book gives hope and practical steps to help eradicate it from the workforce altogether.

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