

## HOLLYWOOD HYPOCRITES

Monday

January 8, 2018

They had another awards show last night in Hollywood, but what made this one so unusual was the fact that so many of the people there were making a very public stand against sexual harassment. Everyone showed up wearing black, and when the spotlight was on them, many voices some specific issues they'd seen or suffered. On the surface, it looked and sounded as if we were finally making positive strides in the right direction, but then I stepped back and examined the issue from a distance, and what I found was hardly surprising. Hollywood was full of hypocrites.

Sexual harassment is a real issue, visible just about anywhere you look, from the home to the work environment. As a society, we sit there and talk about how wrong it is, all the while laughing our collective asses off during sitcoms filled with humorous situations about sexual harassment. On the one hand, we love to see the evil villain "get his due," but at the same time, we can't stop laughing at some of the violations being committed. In Hollywood, however, sexual harassment doesn't just occur in a sitcom. We see it in the boardrooms, and not just in a scripted series. A couple of weeks ago, I was watching an episode of Shark Tank and couldn't help but notice that Barbara Corcoran was ogling and making comments about one of the half naked male body builders who'd come onto the show to demonstrate a product, the same Barbara Corcoran who, on live television (Dancing With The Stars), kept reaching back during an interview and grabbing (unintentional?) the crotch of her dance partner.

As I think about what happened, not just on DWTS, but also Shark Tank, I thought about an episode of Big Brother, in which one of the female contestants was chasing around a male contestant and grabbing his buttocks. We all laughed while it was happening, and laughed again the next day, when it was featured on TMZ, but if the roles would have been reversed, if it would have been a man chasing a woman around and grabbing her by the hindquarters, would we have been laughing about it the next day? Or would we have been sitting there talking about how this was yet another example of sexual harassment or even sexual assault? This, however, might seem to many like a relatively benign example, so take a look at a recent movie with Charlie Day and Jennifer Aniston, about a predatory boss who kept sexually assaulting employees and clients alike in the workplace. In it, the employer, a dentist, repeatedly chased the dental assistant around the workplace, day after day, trying to devise situations to isolate, and assault, the employee, in addition to molesting patients who were under. At one point-in-time, the harassment got so bad that the employee actually began to plot the employer's death. Throughout the entire movie, the audience laughed, myself included, and I couldn't help but wonder "why?" Perhaps it was because the predator was an attractive woman and her intended victim a white male. In other words, the shoe was on the other foot, which made it even funnier, but in light of last night's professed "show of solidarity," it only raised more questions than it answered.

If sexual harassment is wrong, then isn't it wrong no matter who's the victim? Man or woman, adult or child? If sexual harassment is wrong, then why are we continuously making television shows and movies which make their money off of making light of them? More importantly, what does it say, not just about the people who make their money off of the movies, but the people who pay to watch them? Hollywood came out last night to make some sort of stand against sexual harassment in the workplace, but was this all for show? I say this because, at the end of the day, the simple truth of the matter is that two things are still going to happen. First, Hollywood is going to continue making television shows and movies which use sexual harassment to get a cheap laugh, and second, as audience members, we're not only going to laugh at these jokes, we're going to fully support them, by buying tickets to see the movies, by watching the TV shows and by purchasing the products advertised in each. We sit here, and under public scrutiny and intense peer pressure, put on a black suit and donate some money to a worthy cause, but when no one's looking, we laugh just as hard as anyone else about the sexual victimization portrayed on the screen, which kind of renders our public contributions as meaningless, wouldn't you say?

Sexual harassment is wrong, in all of its sundry forms, but yet, what we spend when we think no one's looking continue to show our support of sexual harassment. If this weren't true, then advertisers wouldn't be showing scantily clad models, men and women, with perfectly shaped bodies to sell their products. So, as much as I'm against sexual harassment, regardless of where it takes place, don't try to shine a light on sexual harassment, all the while continuing to try to make money off of shows that exploit sex. It just sends a mixed message and completely defeats whatever point you're trying to make. You may not think that the two are related, but they are. It's not just that life often imitates art, it's also the fact that what we watch has a tendency to destigmatize us to the damage that's being caused by the actions depicted.

For example, in an older episode of Will and Grace, Grace had a potential client, a gay man, who made it perfectly clear that his consideration of her as her decorator depended on whether or not she could convince Will to go out with him. Instead of being offended, she immediately went home and told Will, in the hopes of pimping him out to advance her career. As a favor to her, he went out on a date with the guy, and while it didn't work out, the message sent to the viewers was that, sometimes, it's permissible to use sex to get what you want. The fact that it was sex with someone else only made it worse. This is a lesson that many women use on a regular basis. How many times has a woman told a story about being pulled over by law enforcement, only to get out of a ticket because of how much cleavage she showed?

As far as the point I'm trying to make is concerned, there are several. First, a lot of famous people have recently made public statements regarding the evils of sexual harassment, but just because they're saying and doing the "right" thing doesn't necessarily mean that they agree with it. I'd be willing to bet dollars to doughnuts that many of the men are simply going along with the program out of fear of a public backlash for saying what's truly on their minds, which brings me to my second point. "The proof," as they say, "is in the pudding." You can donate all the money you want to, but when you continue making money off of shows that make light of sexual harassment, then I think it's pretty obvious how you truly feel. Either you don't care as much as you say you do, or you realize that your feelings on the matter are unimportant, because your audience doesn't care as much as it claims, which brings me to my third point. At the end of the day, audience members have to shoulder some of the responsibility because, we sit there and denounce sexual harassment, but then we spend our hard earned money to support films and shows that make their money off of making us laugh at sexual harassment issues. Just something to think about.

In the meantime, everyone keeps talking about how we need to start believing the people who come forward with claims of sexual harassment, but truth be told, being believed has never been the issue. Instead, the issue has always been one of priorities. Rather than taking the side of the accusers, company officials have chosen to protect their highest earners. It's only when the threat of negative media attention and financial payouts is higher than what the accused is making the company that the company actually starts to take the accuser seriously and do something about it. But as anyone can tell you, by that time, it's too late. With that said, just because someone's been accused doesn't necessarily mean they're telling the truth. There are all sorts of reasons to make a false allegation, vengeance, money, thrill/attention seeking, even unresolved sexual allegations involving someone else. Instead of just automatically believing, or disbelieving, someone, what we need to be doing is gathering all of the facts and then making our judgement, based on the facts, not emotion. Unfortunately, when it comes to crimes of a sexual nature, the theory of being innocent until proven guilty is more of a pipe dream than a reality. We're so quick to believe that we often don't wait for any facts. The only exception is when you're an inmate making an accusation, in which case you're automatically thrown into the hole and treated as if you're the guilty party, especially if the accused works for the prison.

In our rush to effect change, let's keep in mind that there are always two sides to the story. We also need to remember that, in many instances, the accused can't, or won't, say anything to defend himself for fear that anything he says could be used or twisted to be used against him, either in the courts or in the court of public opinion. As a result, we often don't get to hear the other side of the story until the case actually goes to court, by which time it's usually far too late, as we've already convicted and crucified him in our minds. This isn't to say that all accusers are lying, but it's also not to say that all of those accused were guilty, just that we live in a country in which we're supposed to be innocent until proven guilty, and for good reason. And if you doubt that, just take a look at all of the people who've been falsely convicted of rape, by an accuser who personally identified them in court, only to find themselves released dozens of years later due to DNA evidence. False accusations, for whatever the reason, can, and have happened, and will continue to do so, regardless of the nature of the accusation, which is why it's so important for us to make our decisions based on fact, and not emotion.

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