

**Creating Equitable, Safe and Just Workplaces for Women - and Everyone -- in the Jewish Community: What works? What does not work?**

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**The Myth of HR and the Problem of “Good Guys”**

“At some point, someone — I believe it was Peter, though he no longer recalls this — advised me that I should tell Wieseltier I had said something to a high-up about what happened, lest he be caught unaware. So I stopped by his office. It proved an awful idea. Wieseltier was cold. He wanted to know why. As in: Why would I have said anything? In my recollection, he told me that I was acting like a child. In the moment, I felt like one. I had spoken, I said feebly, because I had felt uncomfortable. If that sounds inarticulate, that’s because it — I — was.

In my presence, Wieseltier told higher-ups at the magazine that his marriage was a happy one, that he had no reason to be untoward. Of that night, he said we had merely “shared” a kiss. I remember that word. It was so breezy. It was so easy. It was so nothing. It was practically a lark. I don’t remember speaking. I certainly don’t remember challenging it. I began to question myself, in that room, in that moment, a doubt that stayed with me for years. That was his version of events. At the time, and for a long time after, I wrestled with how I might have responded. What could I do? What was real, after all? Wasn’t this, too, a version of reality? As far as I know, the entire incident was never spoken of again. I hadn’t yet heard the word “gaslighting,” but I think of it now. The very few people who learned of the incident from me were left with only one clear takeaway: Silence was infinitely preferable”. (Sarah Wildman, “I was harassed at the New Republic. I spoke up. Nothing happened.” Vox, Nov 9, 2017)

“A few days after the stories about Harvey Weinstein broke, former Vice-President Joe Biden gave a blistering [speech](#) in which he lit into the film executive, noting correctly that “sexual assault is not about sex; it’s about power” Biden also praised the “courageous women” who have spoken about their stories and argued that, ‘It’s long past time for the powerful men in Hollywood to speak up ... Silence is complicity.’

Biden, the architect of the Violence Against Women Act and recently a strong voice in the movement to address campus sexual assault, was right about a lot of things in this speech. But what he did not reckon with was his own deeply embedded complicity, his own direct and serious role in protecting the powerful, in permitting the shaming of women, in directly silencing those willing to speak about their experiences of harassment.

In 1991, then-Senator Joe Biden led the all-white, all-male Judiciary Committee presiding over the confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court. When word got out that Anita Hill, a former colleague of Thomas, was willing to speak about how he’d sexually harassed her, Biden made no effort to seek her out or speak to her. He also initially resisted the calls of his female colleagues in the House to delay the vote to hear Anita Hill’s testimony.

Most crucially, however, Biden declined to call three other women who were willing to testify in support of Hill, including Angela Wright, a woman who had worked with Thomas and had

previously complained of his having pressured her to date him and his comments about her breast size. Altogether it was as vivid an example of every dynamic Biden described in his Weinstein excoriation last week: the shaming, the silencing, the ways in which long-embedded attitudes have allowed generations of perpetrators to escape consequences.” (Rebecca Traister, “The Conversation We Should be Having” *New York Magazine* October 19, 2017)

### **Mentorship and the “Fixing” of Women**

The standard mentoring approach of the mentor as all-knowing [guru](#), dispensing knowledge, implies a hierarchical, one-way relationship that can frame men who mentor women as champions, heroes, even rescuers. In this model, the mentor shares wisdom, throws down challenges, and when necessary, protects his protégé from all malignant forces in the organization. Enter the chivalrous knight-damsel in distress archetype. As [Jennifer de Vries](#) has astutely observed, painting male allies and mentors as heroic rescuers actually strengthens the gendered status quo, inadvertently reinforcing male positional power while framing women as ill-prepared for serious leadership roles. (W. Brad Johnson and David G. Smith, “Mentoring Women Is Not About Trying to “Rescue” Them” in *Harvard Business Review*, March 14, 2018)

### **The Voices that are “Authorities”, and the Ones that are Barely Heard**

“In hearing these individual tales, we’re not only learning about individual trespasses but for the first time getting a view of the matrix in which we’ve all been living: We see that the men who have had the power to abuse women’s bodies and psyches throughout their careers are in many cases also the ones in charge of our political and cultural stories....And while it may feel cathartic for some women to finally get to say things they’ve been waiting years to say, this does not undo the damage. We can’t go back in time and have the story of Hillary Clinton written by people who have -- unlike political commentator Mark Helprin - not been accused of pressing their erections into the shoulders of young women who worked for them. We cannot retroactively resituate the women who left jobs, who left their whole careers because the navigation of the risks, these daily diminutions and abuses, drove them out. Nor can we retroactively see the movies they would have made or the art they would have promoted, or read the news as they might have reported it. This tsunami of stories doesn’t just reveal the way that men have grabbed and rubbed and punished and shamed women; it shows us that they did it all while building the very world in which we still have to live. (Rebecca Traister, “Our National Narratives are Still Being Shaped by Powerful, Lecherous Men” *New York Magazine* 10/27/17)

Let us be clear: Gender bias is not necessarily deliberate but may often be unconscious and require deliberate attention to overcome. What is striking is that many of the men who have not included women on their editorial boards or in their edited volumes are not right-wing, ultra-Orthodox scholars who might have a deliberate religious or political objection to working with women colleagues. On the contrary, most think of themselves as liberal and progressive, and they are often innovative leaders in the field, yet they, too, may overlook, ignore and exclude women. Even women in positions of power can be guilty of excluding and ignoring other women.

What to do? Look at a list of potential speakers at a conference, or contributors to an edited volume or journal, and see if there is gender parity. Speak up! Decline an invitation to participate unless there is gender parity. Keep in mind that gender bias is not limited to men; women, too, need to be deliberate in the invitations they extend and accept. Pay attention to language: When scholars use language of “good fit,” “stature” or “prestige,” these can often signal implicit bias. If you are part of an organizing committee, push for explicit criteria: Is “stature” about the number of publications, the current academic position or something else? Is “good fit” about matching research interests, or is it a cover for inviting the good old boys? Once these criteria are on the table, it is much easier to advocate for inviting particular women. Mentor junior women in your field and invite senior women to collaborate on a project.

Foundations and publishers should also stop supporting all-male conferences and publications. The Hasidism volume, for example, thanks several foundations and institutes for the important financial support that brought together the eight men for four summers of collaborative research; why did those foundations and institutes not insist on gender parity as a condition of funding, and why don't publishers question all-male submissions? It is untenable to claim that no qualified women were available; look at the list of Guggenheim fellows to see the extraordinary number of brilliant women scholars. If there is a lack of women in Jewish studies, perhaps the field itself is to blame. If male scholars cannot correct the bias, perhaps pressure must come from outside. It is time for grants to be denied to projects and conferences that are all or mostly male.

Consider the implications: By not including women scholars, you are deliberately distorting the state of the field, narrowing the range of knowledge and interpretation, and excluding important areas of research and insight. To include women means not simply the presence of female bodies, but of great minds, important experiences and points of view that enhance the quality of scholarship. The answer: We are here. Listen to us. (Susannah Heschel and Sarah Imhoff, “Where are all the Women in Jewish Studies?” *The Forward*, July 3, 2018)

### **Fighting the Patriarchs, Fighting the Patriarchy**

American women's activism has historically taken two forms. One is an expression of direct anger at the ways individual men use and abuse us. It's righteous outrage against the unambiguous enemy with a visible face, the male predator who feeds on our vulnerability and relishes our humiliation. Mr. Weinstein's face is the devil's face du jour, and the #MeToo campaign fits squarely in this camp. The other form is less spectacular but as essential: It's fighting the ways the world is structurally engineered against women. Tied to that fight is the difficult and ambiguous labor of building an equitable system within which women have the wherewithal and power to lead full lives. (Susan Faludi, “The Patriarchs Are Falling. The Patriarchy Is Stronger Than Ever.” *The New York Times*, Dec. 28, 2017)