

*Following is Frances' reaction after the Senate Meeting. It is perhaps the most powerful soliloquy and description of her transformation in the entire text.*

“As I drove home that evening I was left with a confused sense of déjà vu from my days as a medical student in the 1960's, coupled with the sober realization that cultural change within an institution was not dependent on the passage of time alone. Despite a class composition of 40 percent women, in 1991 the educational environment was not significantly different from the one I had experienced thirty years before, and if left unchanged, would continue to have a negative impact on the careers of these young women. The women were still expected to conform to male standards of behavior and, without questioning it, humbly accept the fact they will never be perceived to be ‘as good as’ their male compatriots.

The Senate meeting was the final blow. With sudden crisp clarity I realized I had been, and still was, a target of ‘sexual harassment’ (a most inadequate label) and that my work world was one of blatant gender discrimination. Many actions by some of my male colleagues communicated total disrespect for me and my career, and devalued my competence and performance, in terms of both my past accomplishments and my future potential.

Therefore, I had some tough questions to answer for myself.

Why had I been so blind?

If not blind, exactly, just willing to look the other way?

Like most women, I hate confrontation. Up to 1991 my professional career had progressed because I was willing to be a ‘good sport’ and accept harassment, rather than challenge or question it and risk alienation, dismissal, or not being promoted. Instead, I chose to join the existing system, and had used that system, created by and for men, very well. Female friends were virtually absent from my life, I had only a couple of much younger professional female peers in surgery at Stanford, and I had never learned to respect women. So, in a time-honored way, I yearned for and actively sought approval from men, and defined myself within and by that male approval. I had made my peer group of surgical faculty my friends as well as my professional colleagues. Maintaining their friendship had been essential for my continued career development and academic survival. I certainly had not wanted any of them to be uncomfortable when I was around just because I was a ‘girl.’ Daily we shared a vocabulary of technical language as well as liberal use of four-letter words. My language was just as rotten as theirs. Episodes of inappropriate behavior had not diminished my fondness for them as a collective group. I was accustomed to games played to determine whether, and how far, I would cross a given line. I was well acquainted with raucous laughter erupting at my expense over jokes, nuances, antics, guesses about how good I was in bed. One survived in this masculine world by being one of the boys, and for all intents and purposes I had become one of them. Only I received much more physical attention, having legs that were stroked, a neck that was caressed, breasts that were a topic of conversation as to their size and shape. Frequently offended, I dared not offend, for fear of banishment from the only professional camaraderie I had ever known. Not wanting to lose my quasi membership in the surgeon's club, I had never done anything to stop behavior that was repulsive to me and ultimately damaging to my self-respect and dignity. Instead I had developed a fine art of repartee. I, too, could be insulting, using our dirty language to turn their faces red. Deflecting put downs with humour, I earned the reputation of being able to fend for myself, and had developed tremendous pride in having that ability.

Inherently, I knew sexist behavior was wrong, but thought I was above it and had been able to keep it from hurting *my* career. Now, after the Senate meeting, I realized I might well have damaged the professional lives of others, because my own inaction, over the years, was as responsible as any other factor for perpetuating the sexist climate medical students found abhorrent and were now fighting.

And even though I was well educated about the political process that governed the medical school and had a position of power within the faculty, as well as great visibility, none of this had been, or was, enough to protect me. In fact, no woman in the medical arena had adequate protection. The occasional, carefully selected woman is permitted to accrue power, but in reality, it is only decorative. She is never expected to use it. I had been a safe choice because I had genuinely and wholeheartedly bought into the system and ostensibly was a controllable part of it. Finally, I now understood that the essential functions of our medical world depended on women's willingness to capitulate to masculinity without asking questions, without fighting injustice, with complete servility, because maleness is the purest and most highly revered form of power in our profession.

I was overwhelmed by a profound sense of guilt. My resignation would not change anything. Unless there was a major shift in the way the medical world taught and assimilated its physicians, another generation of women doctors would endure the same abusive conditions I had encountered, believing, as I had, that it was a requirement for membership in the club. For some, the experience of being treated as inferior beings during their medical training would alter them forever, and envelop them with a crippling inferiority complex of self-doubt – a physician condemned to a lifetime of daily self-assessment about her own professional competence. Every morning, as they shave, my male colleagues tell their reflected images, 'I'm the greatest.' By contrast, my morning reflection, as I apply makeup, is asked whether I am good enough to meet the challenge of that day. It was counterproductive for more women doctors to relive my years of self-doubt. The system had to change so they could build their careers based on personal strength and self-confidence" (106).

*We have the "Reformer's Dilemma": Those experiencing discrimination often do not find themselves in a position of sufficient authority to raise their voices without being dismissed. Acquiring enough power to enact real change may require working with, or even condoning, existing injustice. How far is one willing to go in support of the existing system to rise to a position of sufficient authority to change the game? How far would you be willing to go?*

*Playing the game serves to strengthen one's ties to the community and thus furthers careers in the short term, but at the cost of perpetuating norms harmful to the entire community and ultimately oneself. In the rare case that the initial intent is to consciously work one's way to the top to change the very system, how easy is this to do, once one gets there and is used to the existing framework? Has made allies using that framework? Has a reputation based on that framework, unjust as it may be? Has a community based on that framework?*

*A very interesting question that arose in a discussion today is that of the gender- nature of authority structures. In Conley's passage above, we see many statements directed against the "male culture" of her community. Removed from the context of the rest of the book, there is ambiguity surrounding the nature of this male culture, and this ambiguity actually draws an important*

*distinction. Though there may be myriad, let me outline two different concepts of this male culture:*

*Male culture in the sexual sense: power achieved by fondling breasts, derogatory comments, blatant discrimination, etc.*

*Male culture in a gender normative sense: the culture is a hierarchical power structure that is dubbed "male" because it invokes concepts of power and authority, which are socially recognized as primarily male (are they?)*

*From reading the rest of the book, we learn that the "male culture" that Conley experienced before walking out was of the first type - name-calling, groping, refusal to hire because "she had breasts and another candidate didn't." Cultures like this legitimately exclude women - based on sex. Political correctness aside, the legitimacy of claiming female exclusion from the second type of male culture - power structures dubbed "male" because they involve power (a male thing?) - is a little more nuanced. You could potentially invoke a Sheryl Sandberg-esque argument and urge ladies to simply "lean in" to existing power structures, they're not exclusive of women, they just happen to be predominantly male. One could even potentially argue that claiming an authority/power structure is a male structure is inherently discriminatory, because you are making the gender essentialist argument that authority and power are equitable with masculinity.*

*First of all, we have the question of why our societies associate hierarchies of power with men (or do they?) Opinions aside, there is indisputable evidence that the majority of people who occupy top level authority positions are men (with a national average of about 12% female at the top in STEM fields). Is power an inherently male thing? Do men inherently possess more structured, assertive, authoritarian management "styles" that require a hierarchy to be in place to be successful, whereas women exercise a more collaborative or democratic style? Or are hierarchies simply common ways of governing large institutions, and for centuries, men were the primary actors who occupied positions of authority within these institutional hierarchies, so the association simply grew in the public mind?*

*How effective is hierarchy as opposed to flat or distributed governance?*

*We note that the power structure in Conley's case (the neurosurgeon) is sexually rooted - men achieve authority through sexual power play with their subordinates- groping women, sexually belittling men that work for them, etc. To what extent is hierarchy inevitably rooted in sex? We think back to our evolutionary roots and recognize that in a very animal sense, sex is power - the alpha male would be the one who boasted the biggest harem and could impregnate the most females (and thus further his genes, etc.). What does it take to organize a fair hierarchy?*

*Another standing question: one of making accommodations for women in particular fields.*

*There is evidence out there that the more women enter a field, wages decrease and leave is given, ceilings are imposed on the number of hours that can be legally worked in a week, and other accommodations are given to supposedly support women's development of a family. We also see that as more of these accommodations are given, more men leave the field and strike out in an uncharted area - take start-ups and start-up culture, for instance. It is often the case that this uncharted area is one of high risk. There is also evidence that women are more risk-averse than men. We return to the age-old question, is this evidence of male preference for risk an inherently*

*male trait (and the tendency towards stability an essentially female quality), or is it socially attributed?*

*We return to the effect of accommodations. As a gross overgeneralization, consider the hypothetical development of the following cycle: in an existing culture, group A is normative, group B is discriminated against. Accommodations are eventually made for group B, the culture becomes more stable. Group A leaves (to what extent do the effects of accommodations cause this departure?) in search of a higher risk higher reward environment (think tech start-ups). Here, a new culture develops, again A-normative. This new culture becomes less high risk, members of group B begin to play a part in this new culture, but the hierarchy in place excludes group B. Eventually, accommodations are made, and group A ultimately leaves, to strike off elsewhere, and the cycle continues. It would be interesting to experimentally verify the potential for existence of this cycle by looking at how gender ratios in different fields change over time. And possibly correlating this with accommodations made.*

*So the question is, if this cycle exists, how can reform be enacted without driving the majority group away? Gender equality in STEM is a touchy subject with many men today, men who are fed up with gender quotas and feel like they're becoming victims of a form of majority discrimination themselves.*

*On another note, is sexual harassment still harassment if it is consented?*