LEANING IN TO THE BACKCOURT VIOLATION

FACEBOOK CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Sheryl Sandberg's new book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (Knopf, 2013) has been credited with trying to re-start a conversation on the "gender-problem-that-has-no-name" (*New York Times,* 2/21/13). If you're not already familiar with the book, here's a quick summary: Sandberg recapitulates previous studies by academic researchers and gives them a platform among a certain group of elite power brokers (the evidence: Richard Branson of Virgin Group had her TED Talk front and center on the Virgin Airlines reservation page for a week in mid-March). Her key message is that subtle, unintended, diffuse, unrecognized forms of discrimination are nevertheless combining to produce systemic effects of gender disadvantage. A 2007 study conducted at Barnard stressed similar concerns and called such diffuse forms of discrimination micro-inequities.

A study Sandberg memorably cites, the Heidi/Howard Roizen study, conducted by Francis Flynn at Stanford goes like this: Flynn's students examined the profile of Silicon Valley executive Heidi Roizen with half the class reviewing that profile tagged to the name "Heidi Roizen" and the other half tagged to the name "Howard Roizen." Despite the same qualifications, Heidi (not Howard) was rated as aggressive, as someone not to be hired, and as someone these students would not want to work with. Sandberg uses this study and others to forward this fact in the twenty-first–century U.S. context:

For men, success correlates positively with likeability
For women, success correlates negatively with likeability

Because people are promoted based on their likeability—not only on their efficacy—women face a structural barrier to becoming (more) successful.

As various criticisms of Sandberg have pointed out, speaking about successful women's disadvantage in the pursuit of even further steps up and across the corporate " jungle gym" does not speak to the majority of women's concerns. Undoubtedly, the controversy greeting Lean In

also derives from her focusing on what women do to hold themselves back rather than recommending systematic, institutional changes; the latter—according to her—remain the predominant emphasis of prior policy recommendations. In a recent KFWB radio interview, I called Sandberg "shrewd" in her deliberate appeal to "individual" action: "Men at the top are often unaware of the benefits they enjoy simply because they're men, and this can make them blind to the disadvantages associated with being a woman," she writes. Her follow up is: "Once we are aware, we cannot help but change"—but I'm not so sure about that.

Men at the top have continually to be reminded to act concretely to erode gender bias and the ordinary, subconscious—or, here, the better term might be "thoughtless"—ways in which women continue to be subjected to systematic disadvantage. Here, I'm pivoting (sports pun intended) to the recent hiring of Steve Alford as Bruins head basketball coach by UCLA Athletic Director Dan Guerrero. Dan Bernstein, a sports anchor at CBS Chicago, reports that Guerrero either chose to ignore or didn't find relevant Alford's past poor conduct with regard to a 2002 scandal that erupted involving his then-star basketball player, Pierre Pierce, when Alford coached at the University of Iowa. After a fellow female U of I student accused Pierce of sexual assault, Alford reportedly enlisted "the help of close friend Jim Goodrich, the campus representative for [the] Christian group Athletes in Action who. . . [asked] the victim [to attend a] 'prayer meeting,' at which she was [then] urged to back off and not cause problems for a basketball program that could overpower her" (http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2013/03/31/bernstein-ucla-hired-a-scumbag/). The more temperately worded official report by the U of I investigative committee acknowledges that non-University individuals from Athletes for Action initiated contact with the female assault victim (she did not reach out to them) and that this meeting intended to "informal[ly] resolve" the student's complaint only "confirmed her fears that the University would act to protect its athlete" rather than to support her (http://news-releases.uiowa.edu/2003/april/040903skorton.html).

Alford has defended himself by asserting that the event happened eleven years ago and that he followed the university's protocols and the guidance of its legal advisor. But clearly the issue isn't one of Alford's criminal culpability in relying upon and enhancing "informal" pressures to silence a female victim of sexual assault. If the U of I had found Alford criminally liable they would have been compelled to initiate legal action. And here's where the Sandberg book—so differently pitched than this scandal involving sexual assault and the judgment of sports' coaches and the Bruin athletic and academic male leadership—may offer us useful tools for thinking. The issue once again concerns the diffuse, ordinary ways in which—in this case—women and other victims of molestation are not given the support to voice outrage and grief over their bodily violations. Women are not simply held back by being negatively perceived because of their "success" but are held back because, even when victimized and violated, they are asked to swallow their anger and to prepare for the likelihood that others will turn against them, that "men at the top" will refuse their compassionate grievance alongside them.

"Men at the top are often unaware of the benefits they enjoy simply because they're men, and this can make them blind to the disadvantages associated with being a woman," Sandberg writes. What will be the follow-up from our UCLA men at the top, our administrators, faculty, and students, to her prediction that "Once we are aware, we cannot help but change"?

– Rachel Lee