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**Book Review —**

**The Shield of Silence: How Power Perpetuates a Culture of Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace**

by Janet Smith

In 2018, Lauren Stiller Rikleen was retained by the Women’s Bar Association of Massachusetts (WBA) to assist with a project to analyze the prevalence of harassment and other forms of negative behavior in Massachusetts law firms. Each question in the WBA survey asked respondents whether they had experienced certain types of behavior. Those answering affirmatively were asked whether they reported the behavior — and, if not, why.

“In both analyzing the responses and writing the report,” Rikleen notes, “I was struck by the silence.” That experience — and additional research she continued to do related to sexual harassment and misconduct in the workplace — led to her new book, *The Shield of Silence: How Power Perpetuates a Culture of Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace* (American Bar Association, 2019). The central premise of the book is that sexual harassment and other negative workplace behaviors will not be stopped unless the conditions that drive victims and bystanders into silence are eliminated.

The appendix at the back of the book provides a detailed glimpse into the WBA survey responses, as well as an over­view of the survey’s methodology and limitations. Readers of the book may want to do what I did — skip to the back of the book and read about the survey results before returning to read the book’s chapters. One survey question, for example, asks whether the respondent has “ever been the recipient of or copied on unwelcome emails, texts, or instant messages of a personal or sexual nature at work”; 37.5% answered yes and 62.5% answered no. Of those who said yes, 66.67% did not report the behavior. Another question: “Have you ever witnessed any incidents of disparagement of other people or groups in the workplace that made you uncomfortable?” In all, 35.31% said yes and 64.69% said no. Of those who said yes, 74.24% did not report the behavior. Even more compelling are the many anecdotal comments from respondents about the nature of incidents, why they didn’t report negative behavior, and what happened when they did report or tried to intervene.

If I seem to be spending a significant portion of this review talking about the appendix, it’s not because the book’s chapters aren’t well-written, compelling reading; I simply found that the survey results provided a helpful context for thinking about the silence surrounding workplace harassment.

*The Shield of Silence* begins by talking about how silence is learned and how pervasive workplace misconduct is, and then moves into a discussion of how structures that victims can’t access are created. On the latter point, in discussing complicity in bias, Rikleen asks, “What happens in a workplace where senior management is protective of those with whom they have a trusted relationship and HR is protective of senior management?” She notes how often workplace “complicity” is the result of “the convergence of unconscious biases, long-standing loyalties, and an instinctive desire to protect the organization’s brand and its bottom line.”

Rikleen obviously did a great deal of research before writing *The Shield of Silence*, and her wide-ranging interviews and research greatly enrich the book. She places sexual harass­ment within the larger framework of equality. She addresses where gender bias and racism intersect — and how the reach of harassment extends to LGBTQ individuals. The #MeToo backlash is also discussed, as is the need to empower bystand­ers to report.

The whole book is important reading, but the chapter PD professionals may find most valuable is “Beyond the Hashtags: A Blueprint for Change.” The subtitle of one section of this chapter is “Train for Effectiveness, Not Liability Avoidance.” Rikleen discusses the critical importance of well-designed, broad-based training and what that training should address. “A workplace devoted to diversity, inclusion, and respect,” she notes, “must invest the time and resources necessary to help people learn how to address difficult situations.” This chapter also discusses, among other things, internal assessments, policy implementation, encouragement of reporting, prevention of retaliatory behavior, support for those who report, and develop­ment of training techniques for bystander intervention.

*The Shield of Silence* concludes with a final chapter entitled “Imagine” that discusses change that works. This chapter includes a brief section on the role of universities, business schools, and law schools in modeling ways to address inappropriate behavior in the workplace.

Deeply entrenched unconscious biases and power dynamics perpetuate the “shield of silence” illustrated by the WBA survey findings. Rikleen’s book suggests pathways toward ending some of that silence.