

Barbara Kay: Weinstein worst example of common problem in film industry

[National Post](#) - Wednesday September 5th, 2018

I lunched last weekend with friends, both in the film business, one a successful documentarian, the other a producer. Naturally, the tsunami of sexual assault charges unleashed by the Harvey Weinstein affair came up for review. I asked if they had ever experienced Weinsteinian moments. Indeed they had.

Coincidentally, both involved bathrobes that “slid open” to reveal erect penises. Friend A’s incident occurred in a hotel suite during a “business” meeting. She reacted to the sight of the exposed member and the amorous follow-up with firm directions to retreat to the bedroom and dress. Which he meekly did. Friend B’s story was creepier, also involving a “business” meeting, but in the man’s home office; she had greeted his wife and children en route to it. That story also ended with a calm request to back off, and compliance.

So of course my next question was, “And did you ever say anything to anyone?” No, they hadn’t, so we discussed that for a while. They hadn’t consciously thought about it at the time. In retrospect they supposed that since their respective projects were in progress, and eroding these pivotal relationships could easily have aborted them, it made sense to draw a veil over the incidents. Then they ensured that they didn’t put themselves in situations where they were alone with those guys again. A familiar pattern.

We agreed that the entertainment industry is uniquely fertile soil for this kind of behaviour. First, it’s a marketplace with relatively few “buyers” and a tremendous glut of “sellers.” And not just any sellers, but sellers who are particularly invested in a product — talent — whose value to the world is fungible, and which tends to depend (disproportionately to other product markets) for public awareness on self-promotion by the young, the attractive and — too often — the credulous.

Talented hopefuls are often assured by their boosterish family and friends that they deserve fame, so they come to the “negotiating table” wrapped in unrealistic hope, impatient dreams and even delusions of instant celebrity based on familiar legends whose near-freakish rarity they conveniently ignore.

And so in this industry you find boys and girls, young men and women, prepared to make the kind of sacrifices in pursuit of their dream that most other young people would stop short of. It’s also an industry in which — sometimes notoriously — one finds ambition-thwarted parents living vicariously through their children, suppressing their role as natural protectors in what they tell themselves is their child’s interest. How could such an industry fail to excite the imagination of predatory men?

It was good to see the “everyone knew” dam come bursting open. This Augean stable needed a thorough cleansing of its sexual sewage. Weinstein seems a particularly egregious example; he was known to be a terrible bully in general, as seriously abusive to men under his control, sometimes physically, as he was to women sexually. Most Hollywood and media bad boys, I am inferring from anecdotes like those of my friends and from the narratives I have been reading in the press, may try it on, but retreat under determined rejection.

Not to excuse their behaviour, but can anyone claim to be surprised? By all “casting couch” accounts from the early days of the film industry on, sexual quid pro quos were accepted marketplace currency on both sides. Why else would Whoopi Goldberg have been moved to say in 2009 that director Roman Polanski’s 1977 rape of a 13-year old actress wasn’t really “rape-rape.” It was a brutally harsh and unfair statement, but it didn’t come from nowhere. She lamely elaborated with, “We’re a different kind of society, we see things differently ...”

Well, she wasn’t entirely wrong, was she. Polanski’s victim had already been photographed topless at Polanski’s request with her mother’s permission, and the rape took place at actor Jack Nicholson’s home. So in that scenario there are three complicit adults. One could say the mother was naive, but one could also wonder if the mother was willfully naive, such is the lure of the glittering prize.

It takes two to tango, my mother used to say, referring to what her generation called hanky-panky. In the case of these entertainment-industry scandals, it was more like a circle dance: the male sexual opportunists (exploiting both young men and women); the stage-door parents who, wittingly or not, enabled pedophiles; show-biz aspirants who were willing to pay a sexual price for what they assumed would be a short cut to success rather than plodding through the ranks; and of course the “rape-rape” apologists, who knew, but kept shtumm.

There’s no business like show business. The adage still rings true, but irony has corroded its wonted peppiness.