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Women Say to Comey: Welcome to Our World

By SUSAN CHIRA JUNE 8, 2017

A man is being publicly grilled about why he was alone in a room with someone he felt was threatening him. Why didn't he simply resign if he felt uncomfortable with what his boss was asking him to do? Why did he keep taking calls from that boss, even if he thought they were inappropriate? Why didn't he just come out and say he would not do what the boss was asking for?

Sound familiar? As dozens of people noted immediately on Twitter, if you switch genders, that is the experience of many women in sexual harassment cases. James Comey, the former director of the F.B.I., explained to senators during today's hearing that he felt acutely uneasy and hesitant to directly confront his boss, the president of the United States. That's right, even a savvy Washington insider, the same height as LeBron James and no stranger to the cut and thrust of power, seemed slightly ashamed that he had not been able to do so.

"Maybe if I were stronger, I would have," he said, trying to answer a question about why he didn't speak his mind. "I was so stunned by the conversation that I just took it in."

These are the emotions that many women have struggled to explain in the face of sexual harassment, and the ones that have often given defense attorneys grist for what appear to be inconsistencies

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Imbalance of power often lies at the heart of sexual harassment or assault cases, from those of Roger Ailes and Bill O'Reilly at Fox News to the trial of Bill Cosby, underway the same day as the hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee. On Wednesday, Andrea Constand, Mr. Cosby's accuser, concluded two days on the witness stand, with defense attorneys suggesting that her continued contacts with Mr. Cosby undermined her credibility. Unsurprisingly enough, today's hearing shows that power can discomfit and silence men as well as women.

The parallels provoked a lively online conversation:



Danielle Campoamor ✓

@DCampoamor

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Victims of sexual assault & harassment know EXACTLY what [#Comey](#) means when he says he was too shocked to tell Trump he was wrong. [#ComeyDay](#)

11:37 AM - 8 Jun 2017

↩
↻ 76
♥ 162
i



Lora R Fisher

@LoraFisherPOV

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Struck by the parallels with [#sexualharassment](#): pressure, distress, alarm, etc. [#Comey](#) [#ComeyTestimony](#) twitter.com/peterdaou/stat...

5:29 PM - 7 Jun 2017

↩
↻ 27
♥ 52
i



Beth Prusaczyk @BethP_STL

8 Jun

Every woman knows exactly why [#Comey](#) reacted the way he did in those moments with Trump. Stunned, cautious, intimidated. [#ComeyDay](#)

[@BethP_STL](#) I thought it was just me. [#Comey](#) is nearly 7 feet tall, father of 6 children- but his testimony is almost to the T like sexual harassment

12:23 PM - 8 Jun 2017

👤 29 ❤️ 75

Critics of President Trump were not the only ones drawing parallels. Mr. Trump's son, Donald Jr., echoed the question posed in the Senate that Mr. Comey had tried to answer, and defenders of Mr. Trump suggested he should no more be believed than women who level charges of sexual harassment:



Donald Trump Jr. ✓

@DonaldJTrumpJr

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Sen Blunt: If you told Sessions you didn't want to be alone with Trump again, why did you continue to take his calls?

11:58 AM - 8 Jun 2017

👤 2,450 ❤️ 7,883



Tony Klinger

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[#comey](#) claiming [#Trump](#) obstructed justice over [#lynn](#) AFTER he got fired, is like a chick claiming Sexual Harassment AFTER she got fired.

9:25 PM - 17 May 2017

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Sexual harassment and assault often provoke debates about credibility, fairness and bias. But at least for today, the tables were turned, and men could glimpse what women have often endured.

Susan Chira ([@susanchira](#)) is a senior correspondent and editor on gender issues for The New York Times. [Join her on Facebook](#)

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