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OPINIONS

Not so 'INNOCENT' remarks

Some men know it, others refuse to acknowledge it. Plenty are probably unaware of how shabby they make women feel. It's time men thought about it.

RECENTLY, the Los Angeles Police Department's top public relations officer, Cmdr. Tim McBride, was accused of sexual harassment by two female LAPD officers, Sgt. Kristine Kenney and Officer Mary Elizabeth Hatter. Among other actions that run counter to the department's "zero tolerance" policy on sexual harassment, McBride is charged with greeting female officers as "babe," making unwelcome sexual advances toward Officer Hatter, and making lewd suggestions as to how Sgt. Kenney spends her time in hotel rooms.

McBride served a five-day suspension, which he has appealed to the department's Board of Rights.

Not surprisingly, McBride has some vocal defenders, who argue that his behavior is not particularly egregious, and that the women who found it so are overly sensitive. Men will be men, they say, and there isn't much one can do about it.

How to dodge bullets should be of more concern to a female officer than the sexually suggestive quips of her male co-workers. To accept such behavior from the men, for the sake of esprit de corps, is to take the high road.

To complain is to prove the macho dogma that women are wimps.

Such a defense, whether it is served up by a man or a woman, misses the point entirely.

Worse, it trivializes the profoundly important changes now in progress in the venue of sexual politics. However, well- or ill-founded the charges against McBride are determined to be, millions of American

LOCAL VIEW

By Bill Becker

men do commit this kind of sexual harassment of women every day.

After years of consciousness raising by feminists of both sexes about the inherent juvenility and latent violence underlying most gratuitous sexual comments men make to women, the question is "why?"

Primarily, because those men not suffering from a sexual pathology, but who still enjoy remarking on a woman's anatomy or sexual proclivities — all in fun, of course — are just plain obtuse about the issue in general.

Many of them are loving husbands and fathers, and few consider themselves thoughtless or insensitive, much less intending offense to the women they honor with their sexual commentary.

They simply do not understand that women have every right to be angry, if not enraged, over "typical" male behavior. For these men, it has not yet sunk in that male misuse of power over women, in which sexual abuse ranks highest, went off the chart long ago.

As so often happens with the obtuse, whose sanguine acceptance of backward customs is a major foundation of social injustice, these men now feel that the few years of guilt-tripping they have been subjected to by militant feminism, somehow balances millenniums of shameful and criminal treatment women have suffered at male hands.

Thus, millions of American men suffer a vaguely articulated sense that, as men, they are being grievously wronged by forces beyond their control.

Clinging to old habits, in the form of sexist jokes, let's say, is one way to prove to oneself that one still a man.

Nevertheless, not every man whose behavior reveals childish and thoughtless loyalties to a primitive macho sexual ethic deserves to be destroyed or have his career ruined.

Patience, a no-nonsense sense of humor by superiors and perhaps even victims of sexist behavior, and

frequent reminders of the standards of professional behavior will change many of these men.

The disapproval of male co-workers with the courage to voice their own genuine dislike of sexist behavior, while still a rarity in all male-dominated environments, can be especially effective.

Unfortunately, there can be unfounded accusations whenever new rules and laws proscribe deeply ingrained but no longer acceptable social habits.

The best way to reduce the number of innocent male victims of unjust sexual harassment charges is for all of us men to look into ourselves, and try to become aware of how our own attitudes might give tacit approval for the kind of behavior Cmdr. McBride is accused of, or worse, draw us and our families into a shattering experience with militant feminism.

If the refractory male sexist can learn to appreciate how so-called "innocent" remarks can tarnish or even destroy a lifetime of productive work, he might at least change his behavior.

That would be a welcome beginning.

Bill Becker is a freelance writer living in Woodland Hills.