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Women Lawyers Join #MeToo Movement with Hashtag of Their Own

The legal profession's own #MeToo movement is playing out on Twitter. Under the hashtag #LadyLawyerDiaries, the discussion over the last year...

By **Angela Morris** | Originally published on [Texas Lawyer \(/texaslawyer\)](#) | February 15, 2018

The legal profession's own #MeToo movement is playing out on Twitter.



Kendyl Hanks, partner at Greenberg Traurig, left, and Jaime Santos, associate at Goodwin Procter, right.

Under the hashtag [#LadyLawyerDiaries](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ladylawyerdiaries?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Ehashtag) (https://twitter.com/hashtag/ladylawyerdiaries?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Ehashtag), the discussion over the last year has evolved to tackle serious and pervasive issues surrounding women in the law. It's become a [movement](https://twitter.com/JoStanleyEsq/status/955105280483872768) (<https://twitter.com/JoStanleyEsq/status/955105280483872768>) that enables female attorneys to [speak out collectively](https://twitter.com/ABAesq/status/960237830722039809) (<https://twitter.com/ABAesq/status/960237830722039809>) about gender bias and sexual harassment in the legal profession.

We talked with Greenberg Traurig partner Kendyl Hanks of Austin, one woman—along with Goodwin associate Jaime Santos of Washington, D.C.—among a core group of about 15 female attorneys who have joined forces to tweet as one under the [@LadyLawyerDiary](https://twitter.com/LadyLawyerDiary) (<https://twitter.com/LadyLawyerDiary>) handle. The group ranges in age from 20 to 40, coming from diverse legal backgrounds—law clerks, court staff attorneys, law firm associates and partners, law professors, in-house counsel.

Among the prominent [#LadyLawyerDiaries](#) tweeters are Jeena Cho, a San Francisco lawyer who writes about mindfulness for lawyers on her blog “The Anxious Lawyer;” Leah Litman, a professor at the University of California, Irvine School of Law; Rachel Gurvich, a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Law; and Kristen Vander-Plas, an associate with Brad J. Davidson Law Firm in Lubbock, Texas.

Hanks talked about the origins of the [#LadyLawyerDiaries](#) movement, what female attorneys in the community are talking about, why male attorneys should support them, and more. Here are her answers, edited for brevity and clarity.

I'd like to know more about the creation of [#LadyLawyerDiaries](#) hashtag. Who created it, when and why?

The hashtag is something that organically grew among women—professors, lawyers, in-house counsel, judges—as a way of connecting on issues that have been percolating and affecting women in the law. Part of it was the #MeToo movement and we've seen a lot of issues about harassment in the workplace and recent issues in the judiciary.

It's been a year or more, when the hashtag really started. I take no credit for that—it was an organic thing. A lot of us are getting really excited about it.

What's the story behind the @LadyLawyerDiary Twitter handle?

The transition from the hashtag to the handle really happened pretty recently, and what we are learning is: there are a lot of women who want to share experiences and talk about stuff, who don't want to do it under their names; they want anonymity. We get questions by direct message, and we'll share those through the handle, so people can participate in the conversation without other people knowing it's them raising it. It was never intended to be just for me. There's a group of us that tweet from it. In my view, it belongs to all of us.

What is the meaning or gist of the hashtag? For example, what sorts of things are people talking about when they tag #LadyLawyerDiaries?

We try to use the hashtag to promote each other, to talk about other women's accomplishments, and talk about our own experiences. Coming together as a group is really effective in terms of raising awareness about women's experiences, and frankly, just sexism—not just in the profession, but on Twitter. It's become pretty effective, because what we've learned is using the hashtag, people have been more proactive about calling it out. Both men and women have responded to it in a positive way. It's created a lot of good discussion about unconscious bias.

When you consider revelations that have come out through #LadyLawyerDiaries, what are some of the things that have surprised you?

Women have become more emboldened to talk about things. I've been practicing 16 years now. We did not talk about harassment in the workplace. Women have become comfortable sharing. I think it's an incredible development, because things are not going to change if women won't share their stories.

In late December, you wrote a thread about male attorneys beginning to stand up for (<https://twitter.com/HanksKendyl/status/943381563017957376>) their female colleagues who are being sexual harassed or facing gender bias. Why does this mean so much to you?

As long as sexist comments and harassment are just a female experience, I don't think it will ever change. If men don't participate in the conversation, it's always going to be women complaining about it. It's always going to be a "women's issue." It's not a women's issue—it's a cultural issue.

What would you tell male attorneys about the reasons they should also fight for gender equity?

If you're in an environment where only women are expected to protect women, then things are not going to change. Guys will say, "I realize I have not stepped up before—and I'm going to do it." They are doing it. It's not like a junior high dance anymore, when girls are on one side and boys on the other. It's part of the cultural shift happening now because of the #MeToo movement. It's not a heroes thing. We don't need heroes, but we need it to be a genderless issue. Harassment is never OK

Could you explain more about how the #MeToo movement is connected to #LadyLawyerDiaries?

I think it's connected to #LadyLawyerDiaries in the same way women's experiences are connected across any profession. #MeToo is about not just sexual assault and rape: it's about harassment; it's about disrespect; it's about being belittled because of your gender. There's certainly a lot of that in the legal profession and the experiences people have are incredible. One thing we've learned this last year that's so common is before the #MeToo movement, particularly in law firms, women feel if they disclose or make allegations, their legal career is over; no law firm will want to hire them again. They'll be known as a trouble maker. The #MeToo movement allowed women to talk about these issues.

As someone who has watched the #LadyLawyerDiaries conversation unfold, what do you think are the common problems that female attorneys still face in the workplace today?

Women's choices are complicated, and I don't want to speak for every choice every woman has made about her career. That being said, women were in law school in the same rate as men when I graduated, but the levels of women in partnerships—particularly equity partnerships—have not changed much. There's a lot of studies and discussions about reasons for that. There are much bigger forces at play that I think have a lot to do with unconscious bias. Some of the assumptions about women affect their ability to succeed long-term in the legal profession.

What are some examples of the type of unconscious bias you're talking about?

Men who are ambitious and strong are valued, while women who are ambitious and strong are “difficult” and “not team players” and things like that. There’s sort of a perception that the qualities that make men good lawyers are perceived as not good qualities for women. There are a lot of signal words, kind of dog whistles, about women: she’s abrasive; she’s shrill; she’s uppity; words always used about women, and never used about men. We talk about that a lot with the hashtag. The standards women are held to are different, and higher, and over the course of a career, a lot of women get really tired of it.

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