

New technology, same old sexism? | The Avvo NakedLaw Blog

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Business, Crime & Lawsuits

New technology, same old sexism?

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Despite some notable gains, gender discrimination in the workplace is still [widespread and pervasive](#). Surprisingly, one of America's most forward-thinking industries may prove to be its most backward when it comes to gender equality.

Technology companies usually make the news for product launches, but the tech industry as a whole may remember 2015 as the year of the gender discrimination lawsuit. Early in 2015, both Tinder and the Silicon Valley venture capital company Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield, and Byers resolved discrimination suits. Also this year, Facebook, Twitter, and Microsoft have all faced lawsuits alleging similar accusations of systematic gender discrimination, especially in technical and management roles.

Striking a match

When Whitney Wolfe, co-founder of the dating app Tinder, ended a casual dating relationship with another member of the team, fellow co-founder Justin Mateen, he allegedly turned [controlling and verbally abusive](#). When she complained to the Tinder CEO and the CEOs of its parent companies, she was ignored. Soon, Wolfe was pushed out of the company entirely, her [co-founder status erased](#). Wolfe came back with a lawsuit that was settled out of court in January 2015 for what Forbes [reports](#) as “just over” a million dollars.

Still waiting for a “Dislike” button

The [next lawsuit](#) was filed in March, by former Facebook employee Chia Hong. Represented by the same law firm as Ellen Pao, who [lost her discrimination suit](#) against venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins this year, Hong is claiming both gender and race discrimination at the hands of her supervisor and unnamed others at Facebook. Although Hong's is not a class action suit, she is claiming a widespread pattern of harassment at Facebook that includes belittlement and assignment of menial tasks. Hong worked at Facebook from 2010 to 2013, receiving good performance reviews. She was fired after one negative review that she claims was in retaliation for a complaint against her supervisor.

A little bird told me

Days later, former Twitter employee Tina Huang filed a proposed class action, claiming the company's [informal promotion process favors men](#). Huang, who worked for Twitter from 2009 to 2014, says she was put on leave after complaining about the practice to CEO Dick Costolo. Her lawyers have posted a public list of [10 ways that Twitter denies equal job opportunities to women](#).

Glass ceiling replaced by Windows

In September 2015, former Microsoft employee Katie Moussouris filed a putative [class-action suit against the company in Seattle federal court](#), with the now-familiar claim that Microsoft discriminates against female technical and engineering employees in its performance evaluation, pay, and promotion practices. Moussouris worked as a security strategist, or “white hat,” at Microsoft for seven years. She alleges that, from 2010 to 2014, she was repeatedly passed over for promotion in favor of less qualified males.

End line

The merits of these specific cases are sure to be examined at length in the coming year, and it's anybody's guess whether they will go anywhere, but [industrywide numbers](#) certainly do indicate a problem. Women make up 59 percent of the general workforce, but hold only 30 percent of jobs in the technology industry. Even worse, women fill only 23 percent of leadership roles and 16 percent of technical positions in those companies.

With employee demographics that conform to industry averages like these, who wants to bet on whether Google or Apple will be next?

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