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LATEST #METOO LAWSUIT TAKES ON ADVERTISING'S "MAD MEN" CULTURE

TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund Backs Suit Alleging Rampant Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination at TracyLocke Advertising Agency

June 20, 2018 - The latest #MeToo lawsuit was filed today against industry-leading advertising agency TracyLocke, owned by Omnicom Group Inc. The suit details deliberate and pervasive gender discrimination and harassment against female employees, including industry veteran Karen Dunbar, the plaintiff in the lawsuit.

The suit alleges that for the three years she worked at TracyLocke, Dunbar endured the Agency's pervasive "good old boys" culture in which she was excluded, demeaned, harassed and denied equal opportunities as her male counterparts — she knows other women at the company have experienced the same. TracyLocke CEO Hugh Boyle proudly and publicly touted the Agency as a true "[Band of Brothers](#)." Male supervisors suggested taping Dunbar's mouth to silence her, implied she needed a "facelift," offensively laid their hands on her bare skin in front of male subordinates, used their larger builds to physically intimidate her, and marginalized Dunbar as a token sex object to appease client expectations. She and other female employees were subjected to inappropriate touching and groping by male superiors.

The Complaint details how Dunbar was hired for a position substantially below her 25-year experience level and repeatedly denied fair pay and promotions received by less-qualified and lower-performing males. Dunbar was retaliated against when she sought fair treatment for herself and female co-workers. Despite a glowing performance review, she was fired less than three weeks after helping launch a forum for TracyLocke's female employees to voice concerns about unacceptable discriminatory treatment and advocate for the same professional opportunities and pay as male colleagues.

"The #MeToo movement has been characterized by cases involving blatant sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced by high-profile women in the entertainment and broadcast media sectors. Equally as important as challenging these egregious violations is calling out and ending pervasive company-wide discriminatory and demeaning workplace cultures. As described in the Complaint, at TracyLocke, unrepentant predominantly white, male executives perpetuate a "good old boys" culture that facilitates unlawful discriminatory conduct toward women with impunity. This must stop," said **Kerrie Campbell, the TIME's UP Lawyer representing Dunbar.**

The complaint details overt discrimination and harassment including the retention and promotion of a male account director known by TracyLocke and Omnicom HR to have groped a former female subordinate. The Complaint alleges that Dunbar's direct supervisor, as well as

TracyLocke's CEO, made discriminatory, offensive and demeaning statements to Dunbar and other women in the office:

- In a November 2017 meeting with her all male creative team, Dunbar commented that she didn't think a project should be called a refresh because the team had to start from scratch. Her male supervisor replied to the group "I suggested calling it a facelift, but Karen didn't think that was funny." This female-directed jab would not have been made but for Dunbar's gender and professional seniority.
- In December 2017 while discussing headline layouts, Dunbar's male supervisor turned to her and stated to the team, including junior level male and female co-workers: "I can think of something else tape is good for," plainly communicated to Dunbar, as well as male and female subordinates, that Dunbar's mouth should be taped shut.
- During a business trip in Fall of 2017 to San Francisco, Dunbar was the only woman at a meeting with her executive-level male superiors. While awaiting their client's arrival in a conference room, TracyLocke's highest ranking executive, CEO Hugh Boyle, lamented American "PC culture" and – apropos to nothing but blatant sexual harassment – celebrated the term "cunt" as an appropriate word for workplace discussion.

The complaint recounts experiences of other women who confided in Dunbar while at TracyLocke. In a particularly egregious incident, a male Group Account Director groped the breasts of a female subordinate as a male co-worker look on. The male witness confirmed the assault to Omnicom HR. The HR Director told the victim that this was not the first time the male Account Director had been reported. Instead of being appropriately punished or terminated, the Account Director was not only retained but promoted. He remains among the highest echelons of TracyLocke management.

"I've been in this business for 26 years and, like many women, have seen and experienced harassment and discrimination in my professional career. Hands down, TracyLocke is the most blatantly sexist place I have ever worked," said **Karen Dunbar, the plaintiff in the case**. "Having worked my way through the ranks to positions of creative leadership at top New York agencies, I feel compelled to take a public stand not only for myself but for all the women who have been unfairly and unlawfully demeaned, disrespected, diminished, harassed, abused and even assaulted but have been silenced or remained silent fearing they would lose their jobs, income and careers and be blackballed in the industry. With three daughters about to start their professional careers, I cannot stay silent. I feel strongly that I must speak out for them."

The advertising industry [has been widely criticized](#) for its "Mad Men" era culture of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Throughout the advertising industry, men dominate upper-level positions, which translates to disproportionately greater power and higher pay. For example, while women make up about half of advertising industry employees, they [reportedly represent about 12% of its creative directors](#). In 2018, [Omnicom reported a gender pay gap of 30.2%](#), one of the worst pay gaps among large advertising companies.

"The TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund is supporting this case because sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation are deep-seated issues in the advertising industry," **said Sharyn Tejani, Director of the TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund**. "There is an opportunity here to expose and hopefully, change the damaging "Mad Men" culture that persists in this industry.

The increasing number of women entering the advertising space deserve a safe and equitable work environment and one that is not detrimental to their professional and financial growth.”

TracyLocke employs more than 650 professionals across the United States and Abroad. It is part of Omnicom Group Inc., a high-powered industry leader that employs more than 77,000 people in over 100 countries and establishes policies applicable to employees of all Omnicom subsidiaries. In 2012, [Omnicom was sued](#) by former managing director Anna Moca, for sexual harassment and gender discrimination, including behaviors similar to Dunbar’s experience.

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