Sexism in Silicon Valley

In Alice Marwick’s dissertation entitled Status Update, she outlines various events and incidents involving sexism with the tech community, specifically within Silicon Valley. One such event surrounded Leah Culver, the founder of (now defunct) social networking and micro-blogging website Pownce. Culver is a brilliant entrepreneur, who has since founded other successful startups after her time at Pownce. Culver founded Pownce with Kevin Rose and Daniel Burka, but for some reason, most of her success was attributed to her male counterparts. Journalist Owen Thomas wrote a long blog post, telling Marwick that “I find the Leah Culver story fascinating because you actually have a woman who is very deliberately sleeping her way to the top. Like a classic, classic stereotype, almost a parody of how you might imagine that would be done.”(LINK)

Another event involved business strategist Glenda Bautista, where “[b]logger Penelope Trunk wrote a post calling [Bautista] a ‘gold-digger’ for her relationship with WordPress founder Matt Mullenwag, although Mullenwag achieved success after he and Bautista began dating.” (176) Trunk ended up backpedaling due to the realization that Bautista was independently successful, but these events both share a common theme: their success is attributed towards men.

Of course, these are relatively famous people within Silicon Valley, and it should not come as a surprise that they receive criticism. It simply comes with the fame. However, as Marwick points out, the sexism is not solely geared towards the leaders and famous members of the Silicon Valley community. “While many members of the tech scene – both men and women – espoused equality and meritocracy, they simultaneously re-enacted and reinforced sexist stereotypes about women in technology through their own talk and practice. Specifically, women’s contributions to the scene were devalued or attributed to men, women were systematically sexualized and judged on appearance, and structural sexism was denied.” (168). Although the workers deny being sexist and espouse equality and meritocracy, throughout Status Update Marwick witnessed the sexism first hand, and concludes that it is a problem in Silicon Valley.

Marwick, Alice Emily. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. 167+. Print.