

Getting angry, getting even

Public humiliation unleashes fury in women who see themselves as scorned

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Heather Mills. Leanne Domi. Paula Jones.

And now add Julie Couillard's name to the list.

Former cabinet minister Maxime Bernier's ex is not the first woman to feel public scorn and reply in kind.

Within the first minute of a televised interview that ultimately led to Bernier's resignation as Foreign Affairs Minister, Couillard said she decided to talk publicly about their relationship because she felt "humiliated as a woman."

Couillard, a 38-year-old real estate agent, told the French-language TVA network in an interview that Bernier left a secret government document at her home. Whether she hoped that disclosure would ruin Bernier's political career is an open question.

Although poised throughout the interview, she clearly leaves the impression of an angry woman who felt disrespected.

About three weeks ago, the media reported her past romantic links with two criminal bikers and the opposition parties raised security concerns about her relationship with Bernier.

While Couillard was holed up in her home with the blinds drawn, Bernier "did not return my calls for the first three days."

She also said during the interview that she felt "used" by Bernier when he suggested she wear a low-cut dress to his swearing-in ceremony last year.

The outfit caused a stir. "He didn't even hide the fact that was exactly what he wanted to do."

Gary Drenfeld, a relationship expert and Hamilton Spectator columnist, suggests Couillard's decision to go to a lawyer to have the secret document Bernier left at her home properly returned to the government could very well be about retribution.

"Here we have a woman who was angry for Mr. Bernier's lack of communication with her. In terms of her anger, it appears as if she might be acting out on that. Rather than going back to him directly, she is seeking some sort of retribution by taking the more public approach to dealing with his misstep."

"Hello? How about you phone the guy and say, you left your confidential documents here. Come get them."

Marilyn Barnicke Belleghem, a registered marriage and family therapist in Burlington, congratulates Couillard on her public interview and revelation.

"Good for her, if this is her truth, if this is what she needs to say, if this is what happened to her."

Relationships are all about power, said Belleghem. Who has the power and how do you use it?

Couillard's power was her knowledge of Bernier's mistake, Belleghem added.

There are many examples of women who felt scorned and replied in kind.

Leanne Domi, ex-wife of former Toronto Maple Leafs player Tie Domi, filed a divorce application in court in which she claimed former Liberal MP Belinda Stronach had an affair with her husband.

"It was humiliating to me ... I had been made into a fool," she told the media after learning about the alleged affair.

During an acrimonious divorce with Paul McCartney, Heather Mills faced a barrage of public criticism. She felt so scorned she dumped water on McCartney's lawyer during a hearing. She gave a television interview in which she said she had been branded a whore, a gold-digger, a liar, and someone who was fantasizing. She tried to cast McCartney as an abusive, alcoholic husband who cruelly made fun of her disability. Mills, a former model, lost a leg several years ago.

Paula Jones filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against then-U.S. president Bill Clinton in 1994, alleging he had propositioned her and exposed himself to her in a Little Rock hotel room years earlier when he was governor of Arkansas.

Clinton dismissed her accusations and the case was settled out of court, but statements he made during depositions for the lawsuit opened the door to other allegations of sexual activity that almost cost him his presidency.

In one statement he denied having a sexual relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. That eventually led to impeachment charges against him and a lengthy Congressional trial on perjury and obstruction of justice charges.

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