A ten-year-old harassment case at Credit Suisse – once upheld as an example of zero
tolerance – is emblematic of how Wall Street’s culture is still fraught with opposing
interests.

Veteran finance writer **William Cohan** said it took more than two years to research and write an
in-depth piece about a former Credit Suisse star investment banker, a research analyst, and an
incident at after-work drinks. Why? Mainly, the MD’s denial of the harassment allegation, for
which he engaged lawyers in three countries.

Cohan, one of the U.S.' most respected chroniclers of Wall Street, traces a 2010 allegation by a
Credit Suisse analyst that she was groped at an after-work drinks organized by a well-known
MD. The case has wider significance for high finance, which still hasn't faced the type of
reckoning about women and power as other industries like entertainment and media have.
Credit Suisse: Zero Tolerance, or Both-Siderism?
Thursday, 20 August 2020 10:53

It took 26 months start to finish to get this published.

Why has Wall Street not had its #MeToo moment you ask? This is why.

Three-part series

Amy Walker’s War on Credit Suisse and a System of Entitled Indifference https://t.co/r0gMHDWsZm via @FFJ_report

— William D. Cohan (@WilliamCohan) August 10, 2020

The case effectively spawned a similar investigation at UBS, where a graduate trainee said Credit Suisse’s response had emboldened her to come forward at UBS about allegedly being harassed by an MD in a powerful position at the Swiss firm’s investment banking unit in London. UBS in June settled a discrimination and harassment lawsuit with the former graduate

The alleged victim in the Credit Suisse case sought to have her case heard repeatedly, by both the bank and the police. Neither she nor her alleged harasser is with Credit Suisse anymore: Credit Suisse dismissed the MD without cause in 2018, following a new investigation under ex-CEO Tidjane Thiam.

Telling Denouement

The ex-Credit Suisse MD denied to the FFJ that he had groped the woman against her will. The denouement – and Cohan’s difficulty publishing the piece – is telling: Credit Suisse allowed the MD to keep deferred and back compensation, Cohan reports for «The Foundation for Financial Journalism,» a non-profit devoted to in-depth financial investigative reporting.

The case speaks volumes about why women don’t come forward and speak out about the traditionally macho culture that still appears to be a huge part of investment banking. At Credit Suisse, Thiam’s handling of a new investigation into the case in 2018 was widely applauded as an earnest effort to help make Wall Street a safer place for women to work.

Violation Vs. Consensual

During that probe, Credit Suisse’s regulatory and compliance chief, Lara Warner, came to view
the incident as a violation, and not a consensual romantic encounter, the «FFJ» reports. Besides dismissing the MD, this led to an offer to pay $100,000 into a charity of the woman’s choosing, and the elevation of Antoinette Poschung to its top management as ombudswoman for conduct and ethics.

What emerges in the FFJ’s reporting is that big banks like Credit Suisse are still delicately balancing their own interests with those of alleged victims. Credit Suisse categorized the man accused of harassment as a «good leaver» after he brought a legal suit against the bank. The terms of departure are relevant for vested pay schemes.

Banks’ Self-Interest

The woman told the outlet she was outraged at what she felt was both-siderism by Credit Suisse. She declined to take the bank up on its charitable donation offer, saying she wasn’t willing to allow the bank to «use me for the purposes of superficial and transparent PR exercises.»

Credit Suisse said it «expects the highest standards of conduct from its employees, and treats allegations regarding harassment or assault with the utmost seriousness.» The bank said it had reviewed our policies and processes following Poschung’s elevation to top management to ensure these types of cases are addressed thoroughly and with delicacy.