

United States: Six Perspectives on the Future of #MeToo

Friday 15 December 2017, by [COVERT Bryce](#), [FONDA Jane](#), [LIPSITZ Raina](#), [MEYERSON Collier](#), [POLLITT Katha](#) (Date first published: 13 December 2017).

Our writers reflect on how this remarkable moment of accountability can grow and endure.

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The Other NRA

By Jane Fonda

Women in every sector of the entertainment industry are working to transform Hollywood in the wake of the Weinstein revelations. The determination is palpable: We will not stop until laws and policies are put in place that guarantee a safe work environment and equality in the industry.

Women are finally being heard only because most of the brave actresses coming forward to blow the whistle on Weinstein have been white and famous. But it was African-American women who pioneered the fight against sexual harassment, engaging in landmark legal battles as early as 1975. Anita Hill endured humiliation while bringing sexual harassment to light in 1991. In 2007, Tarana Burke, a black activist, started the first “Me Too” campaign against sexual assault [1]. Too often, these women were not heard.

In order to root out the problem today, we must understand that working-class women, women of color, trans women, and disabled women constantly experience harassment, assault, and rape—and they’re more likely to be fired if they speak up. I am sickened when I hear male friends call what’s happening a “witch hunt.” Don’t they realize that this movement needs to be far larger, not smaller?

Today, we are seeking solutions that benefit all women. Achieving equal pay for equal work and ensuring that women hold equal decision-making power in all industries will go far in ridding this country of the scourge of sexual abuse. I can think of one critical way to do this: 14 million people work in the restaurant industry [2], and the vast majority of its tipped workers are women. It is among the country’s fastest-growing industries and the single largest source of sexual harassment in the workplace. These workers aren’t paid the full minimum wage and therefore must put up with abuse because they rely on tips. Many are single mothers supporting families. They must please the customer at all costs, and often are encouraged to wear tight, revealing clothes.

It doesn't have to be this way. Seven states eliminated the two-tiered wage decades ago [3]; with waitresses earning the full minimum wage, sexual abuse was cut in half [4]! This is an important lesson: When power and salaries are equal, women are less vulnerable and men are forced to behave.

As we engage this fight, we cannot overstate the deep psychological cost of sexual abuse. I work with adolescents around issues of sexuality, and I have seen how sexual abuse can have a lifelong impact on a woman—destroying her ability to trust and her sense of agency over her body, filling her with shame even though she was the victim. Seeing how rife our workplaces are with such abuse is nauseating.

Now is the time to move from #MeToo to #NeverAgain. It will take time. It will require women to have each other's backs across the lines of race, class, ability, religion, and sexual orientation. But if sexual harassment is about power, the solution is too. And with every act of solidarity, our power grows.

Jane Fonda

Rethinking the Workplace

by Bryce Covert

Something is different. After decades of knowing what sexual harassment looks like and the toll it takes on women, the country seems ready to snap out of the collective fantasy that it's really not a problem. Politicians have lost seats, projects have been canceled, idols have fallen from grace.

But for this moment to become more than a flicker in time, more needs to happen than for a few famous men to lose their jobs. Sexual harassment is virtually everywhere a woman turns in the economy. Forty percent say they've experienced unwanted sexual attention or coercion at work [5]. It infects industries across the board: white-collar professions such as finance [6] and technology [7] as well as minimum-wage work in restaurants [8] and hotels [9].

To harness the energy of this moment and ensure that it leads to something lasting, change can't just happen one man at a time, years after the abuse has occurred. Employers need to completely transform the way they handle sexual harassment when it first rears its ugly head.

Before the #MeToo moment, very few victims of sexual harassment did much of anything about their abuse. That's in large part because they feared they wouldn't be believed or, perhaps worse, would face repercussions themselves. Indeed, most employers' instincts are either to sweep things under the rug or to take it out on the person reporting the harassment [10]. One study found that three-quarters of the people who spoke up about harassment faced retaliation; other studies found that those reporting it commonly experience indifference or trivialization of the event. Companies' motivating fear has been of litigation or bad PR, not of the toll that harassment actually takes on people.

Employers may think that it's better for the bottom line to protect an abuser who's an influential leader or rainmaker. But even if he's a superstar, businesses lose by protecting the harasser. Women

who are harassed are far more likely to withdraw at work [11] or to leave altogether [12]. Their misery often spreads to other employees, who are negatively affected by the unhealthy environment. These costs outweigh any benefits accrued by keeping an abuser on the payroll. A study measuring workers' output found that it costs more to replace employees who leave because of a toxic co-worker than it does to get rid of him. Even if he's in the top 1 percent of the most productive people at a firm, the price in lost output from holding on to a toxic employee is twice that of cutting him loose [13].

We must seek solutions that will benefit all women. Equal pay will go far in ending sexual harassment.

Workplaces where women are generally well supported—not just protected from discrimination, but also paid fairly and given an equal shot at leadership—do better financially than those that fall short in this regard [14]. If moral offense doesn't move employers to reform how they react to sexual harassment, then the raw numbers should.

To change women's experiences at work, company leadership must take allegations of harassment and abuse seriously when they are first made. Human-resources departments in particular need to be retooled, empowered, and better equipped so that their mandate is not just to protect an employer from legal action, but to avert the negative consequences that all employees suffer from inaction. A union, of course, can serve as a truly independent entity that advocates for employees' needs.

Women should be given the benefit of the doubt, not retaliated against, and swift and strong action has to be taken against anyone who is harassing his co-workers. Only then will more women feel that they can come forward. Eventually, abusive employees will find themselves in a world where they can't count on their actions being tolerated or ignored. That will finally prevent harassment from starting in the first place.

Bryce Covert

Waiting for the Backlash

by Katha Pollitt

Is #MeToo the feminist storming of the Women's Bastille? The start of something huge that will just roll on and on and transform our workplaces and our lives? Historically, feminist waves have been followed by backlash, or they've petered out as attention drifted or the lift got too heavy or the opposing forces too powerful. (Something like that happened with the French Revolution, too.) But could this time be different?

I keep waiting for #MeToo to blow up in our faces. Someone will lie. Or someone will tell a mostly true story that doesn't quite hold up on the details. Or the story will be entirely true, but the teller will be made to look untrustworthy. Someone will set a trap, like Jaime Phillips, undercover operative for James O'Keefe's Project Veritas, who falsely presented herself to *The Washington Post* [15] as a former teen victim of Senate candidate Roy Moore. She was caught out—she wasn't very good at her job, and the *Post* reporters were terrific at theirs—but there must be a ton of right-

wing organizations working on similar ratfucks. Every day I go to sleep amazed that none of this has happened yet, even as one powerful, famous, highly paid, long-protected man after another has been sent packing. I mean, Matt Lauer. Garrison Keillor. I'm not used to women being believed.

Do I worry about consequences? Of course. It could redound against women at work—I'm sure there are plenty of men who suddenly think Mike Pence's refusal to dine alone with women other than his wife makes a lot of sense [16]. It could turn into a sex panic if "inappropriate behavior" comes to encompass noncoercive conduct: infidelity, or co-workers fooling around at the office Christmas party, or the occasional edgy joke that falls flat. It could drive Republicans even crazier: Only 9 percent of Trump voters [17] say they believe the multiple accusations against Moore, because they really want to vote for him and it's hard to admit they'd vote for an accused molester of underage and teen girls. How long can they keep up the pretense that they care about family values and chastity and Jesus? It must already be quite a mental strain. Conservatives are surely filled with joy that the majority of ousted harassers have been Democrats, but it's hard to find Dems who maintain that the accusers of Harvey Weinstein or Leon Wieseltier or even Al Franken are lying. Lest we forget, that is what White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders says about the women—all of them—who have accused President Trump of molesting them.

Employers may think that it's better for the bottom line to protect an abuser. But even if he's a superstar, businesses lose by protecting a harasser.

It's tempting to say: Away with all these men! We will replace you—with women. Sometimes, indeed, I've thought that the only way women will advance is through a great clearing-out of sexist men (and their female enablers). That leaves open some big questions about due process and fairness and also proportionality. Do we really want to say that a photo-op grope or a salacious remark around the watercooler is the same as being masturbated on, or even raped? "Zero tolerance" sounds radical and righteous, but what it can mean in practice is that Mike Cernovich, the far-right rape apologist who promoted Pizzagate, can get MSNBC to fire leftist commentator Sam Seder by digging up an eight-year-old tweet [18]. (After much protest, MSNBC reinstated Seder.)

I have no solutions other than the obvious ones—unions, fairer procedures, raising boys differently, a new culture in which bullying is unacceptable, lots more women in power. We need to think about restricting nondisclosure/non-disparagement agreements, which enforce silence on victims and allow harassers to carry merrily on. Meanwhile, it's hard to feel too sorry for the serious harassers like Matt Lauer who have lost their careers. The big story is the women who never got to have theirs.

Katha Pollitt

After the Reckoning

by Collier Meyerson

As the wave of sexual-harassment revelations rolls on, the most pressing question becomes: What do we do with the men who have done wrong? Do we purge them from our society, limiting indefinitely their job opportunities, supervisory power, and public esteem? Should there be a scale based on the severity of the offense? Or would a different approach altogether, something less puritanical and

more rehabilitative, be preferable?

We can—and should—do both. In some situations, casting the offending man aside and paving the way for women to take power is the answer. But to end the culture in which sexual harassment is met with impunity, accountability for men who have already done wrong is not enough. Men will continue to find a way to harm women if they are not taught from an early age to do otherwise. “There is sex education for boys,” wrote Stephen Marche in *The New York Times* [19], “but once you leave school the traditional demands on masculinity return: show no vulnerability, solve your own problems. Men deal with their nature alone, and apart.”

In the fight against the religious right for comprehensive, evidence-based sex education, we should include education on the meaning of masculinity and manhood in our vision, and should encourage families to have conversations on that subject early and often. “I’m not asking for male consciousness-raising groups,” Marche wrote; “let’s start with a basic understanding that masculinity is a subject worth thinking about.” But, actually, consciousness-raising is a great idea. Scott Morgensen, a gender-studies professor at Queen’s University in Ontario, told me that he came to feminism by empathizing with his mother, who raised him and his brother alone. “There must be countless examples in men’s life experiences that give them a window into the daily struggle—social and psychic—that women endure in a sexist society,” he said. “It’s in that spirit...that I invite all of the men who are confused or resistant or unsure or feel defensive or threatened to take time to listen deeply and feel, to the extent that it’s possible, the messages that the women around them are telling them.”

Casting out the “bad apples” is not enough. Men will continue to harm women unless they are taught from an early age not to.

Michael Kimmel, executive director of the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities [20], believes that men need to do a lot more talking to one another. Part of the problem, he says, is that even those who aren’t sexual assaulters can be complicit in and enable such behavior. Kimmel cites Donald Trump’s infamous “grab ‘em by the pussy” remark [21]: “Imagine that [Access Hollywood co-anchor] Billy Bush and all those other guys said, ‘Donald, that is disgusting, not to mention illegal.’ Would he still boast so much about his behavior if they said that?

“The place where it has to start is in the behavior of other men,” Kimmel concludes. “We have to say, ‘It’s not OK with us.’”

We are not nearly finished with this period of reckoning, in which men—some whom we expected, others whom we were shocked by, and yet others whom we love—fall, one after another, like a domino game getting messy. But it’s also time to think about what will happen after this particular deluge of firings, dropped projects, and cancellations finally subsides, and how we can prevent another generation of women from facing pervasive harassment in the workplace. We need to do more than cast out the “bad apples,” because as we’ve learned in the last month, it isn’t just a few men—it’s an entire orchard.

Collier Meyerson

Capital Vs. Women

by Raina Lipsitz

From slaves to seamstresses, mill workers to mine workers, actresses to lawyers, working women have been sexually harassed and assaulted on the job for as long as they have labored. The decimation of organized labor and the rise of the gig economy have stripped many American women of worker protections and made them more vulnerable to workplace sexual abuse. Socialist feminists and union members were early leaders in the fight to end sexual harassment, because they understood it as something that the economically powerful did to the economically vulnerable.

This vulnerability extends far beyond the workplace. In a country like ours, where 56 percent of people have less than \$1,000 in their checking and savings accounts combined [22], and where women are 35 percent more likely than men to live in poverty [23], it's difficult to decouple gender inequality from economic precarity. Comedian Tiffany Haddish recently revealed to *Late Show* host [24] Stephen Colbert that she was homeless early in her career. According to Haddish, fellow comedian Kevin Hart asked why she was sleeping in her car when she could just live with a man. Haddish's delivery made the punch line—"Look, I sleep with people to heal them, not for roofs over my head!"—sound funny, not grim. But it's hard to ignore the implication that many women enter into personal and professional relationships with men out of necessity—indeed, they are expected to. How many American women stay in bad jobs or bad relationships, or tolerate predatory colleagues and abusive bosses, because they (or their children) need health care or food or shelter?

If widespread inequality breeds abuse, we know one popular solution that won't work: more female CEOs. Women in power often discard or abuse vulnerable women just as men do. Yvette Vega, the longtime executive producer for disgraced talk-show host Charlie Rose [25], failed to protect the young women who worked for him, even after one of them complained of Rose's behavior. When Michael Oreskes, NPR's former senior vice president for news, was Washington bureau chief for **The New York Times**, his then-deputy, Jill Abramson—who later became the paper's executive editor—witnessed him harassing a young female aide and did nothing [26]. Among the few female CEOs we do have, a number of them have terrible track records. Supposed feminist CEO Miki Agrawal (formerly of Thinx, a start-up that makes menstruation-proof underwear) has been accused of sexual harassment by a former employee [27]. Sophia Amoruso, former CEO of Nasty Gal and author of *#GIRLBOSS*, was sued for firing employees seeking maternity leave [28].

The cure for sexual harassment lies in building a society in which women never have to depend on one man, or one job, for survival. There's a reason that sleazy "pickup artist" tactics playing on women's insecurities are likelier to fail [29] in democratic-socialist countries like Denmark, where women have social supports—including ready access to abortion, health care, and child care—that allow them to live independently of men, whether those men are bad partners or bad bosses.

Of course, male socialists can be pigs, too (see Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former head of the International Monetary Fund and a once-likely Socialist candidate for the French presidency, who was arrested in 2011 for sexually assaulting a hotel maid). But men in socialist societies have fewer mechanisms of coercion and control at their disposal. Judith Levine wrote in a *Boston Review* [30] article that men like Harvey Weinstein and the late Roger Ailes, who headed up massively wealthy corporations, "are embodiments of capital, using its power not just against some women, but against all women and all workers." The power of capital has grown with rising inequality; it's time to flatten both.

Raina Lipsitz

Now It's Impossible to Unsee

by Joan Walsh

When the tsunami of sexual abuse revelations began this fall, and analysts began bone-headedly asking for solutions, I kept thinking about Amy Schumer's hilarious sendup of *Friday Night Lights*, [31] in which she created a simple Public Service Announcement about sexual assault, twisting the show's football slogan "Clear Eyes, Full Hearts, Can't Lose" into "Clear Eyes, Full Hearts, Don't Rape." An extraordinarily patient version of FNL's Coach Eric Taylor, played by Josh Charles, repeatedly instructs his high-school players that there is no case in which it's acceptable to have sex with a woman without consent—not "at away games," or "if she's dressed like a sexy cat" or even "if my mother's the district attorney and says she won't prosecute." (Schumer plays his loving, ever-comforting wife Tami with a glass of wine that gets bigger in every scene, another FNL in-joke.) Coach Taylor's message is simple: Don't rape. Just don't. Ever. That's it. (It turns out the townspeople don't want to hear it.) Just watch. [32] You'll laugh 'til it hurts.

If Congress needs new anti-sexual-harassment and -assault training, they can start with Schumer's video. (She's Chuck's cousin, so it's easy.) It makes the point simple. Don't grope. Don't grab. Don't try to sneak a kiss. Don't rub your penis against a woman (or man) without permission. Don't rape! How the hell is this hard to grasp?

The dawn of the #MeToo moment found me inspired. Months later, I confess I'm getting tired. Tired of repeating myself in this debate over what to do with all of these creepy men, everywhere, and tired of telling even the good men what it is they need to do—and not do—and whether, in fact, they have already done it and are about to get caught. I am tired of being expected to grapple with ancient arguments like those in Stephen Marche's *New York Times* op-ed "The Unexamined Brutality of the Male Libido," [33] as though he invented the claim that violence is intrinsic to men's sexuality. That's the self-serving foundation of patriarchy, doofus. We are supposed to civilize you animals: men. But we're all animals, expected to restrain much more than just our animal sexual urges, and most of us do it reasonably well. Why is this an excuse? Also: isn't the goal of sexual intimacy to negotiate what sex means to us, anyway?

Also: I'm done trying to civilize lazy men like you. I'm calling in sick from now on. I'm also sick of debating the proper consequences for these disappointing men. Should *House of Cards* or *Transparent* or the future œuvre of Louis C.K. die for Kevin Spacey or Jeffrey Tambor or C.K.'s sexual sins? I don't care. Wake me when it's over.

You know what I'm not tired of? The suddenly obvious issues I don't even have time to examine. Like the infrastructure of oppression that's come into sharp focus this year. I'm staggered by the way this ugly patriarchal culture has shaped, or misshaped, women's lives. We can suddenly see clearly all the time and energy that we spend fending off gross come-ons, and much worse. And we can imagine, if we dare, what our lives might have been like if we could have put all that energy into our art, our work, our friends and families. I feel like I've lived my life in rooms where the ceilings are so low that I can't stand up. I want to stand up. And I want to know the stories of the women who left the fields of acting, directing, journalism because of this abuse.

I also want to understand how a cadre of male journalists now accused of some kind of sexual abuse

distorted the historic presidential candidacy of Hillary Clinton—who lost to pussy grabber in chief Donald Trump. From the mediocre Mark Halperin, the tedious chin-stroker Charlie Rose (if only he kept his hands on his chin), NBC’s irritating Matt Lauer, who nuked Clinton at the commander-in-chief forum; to the left-wingers now charged with abuse like The Young Turks’ Jordan Chariton; and let’s not forget the late Roger Ailes, creator of Fox News, or his mentee Bill O’Reilly. All of these men, over the years, helped create the stereotype of Clinton as a lying, hectoring, sexless harpie, which her serially adulterous, sexually abusive opponent rode to victory. I’m indebted to Rebecca Traister [34] for first pointing this out. Now it’s impossible to unsee, and I want to understand how it worked.

So I’m checking out of the debate, at least temporarily, over consequences for these men, and over what they need to learn. I’m more focused right now on what women need to learn, and I don’t want to give that up to help men. Or even to help punish them.

Joan Walsh

P.S.

* THE NATION. DECEMBER 13, 2017. 6:00 AM:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/6-perspectives-on-the-future-of-metoo/>

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Joan WalshTWITTERJoan Walsh, The Nation’s national-affairs correspondent, is the author of What’s the Matter With White People? Finding Our Way in the Next America.

Footnotes

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