**Introduction: Post Weinstein: Gendered Power and Harassment in the Media Industries**

Shelley Cobb and Tanya Horeck

“Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades:” so ran the headline to Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey’s October 5th, 2017 *New York Times* article, which broke the story of the Miramax founder’s three decades long serial sexual harassment and abuse of women in the Hollywood film industry. Since then, in the weeks and months that have followed, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented cultural acknowledgment and conversation about sexual assault and harassment in Hollywood and beyond. From Ronan Farrow’s searing investigative reports in *The New Yorker* (in which he interviewed many of the women abused by Weinstein and exposed the disturbing complicity of the film industry)to the millions of powerful social media posts under the #metoo hashtag, the revelations have come thick and fast. Powerful men from a range of sectors, including the film, music, literary, media, sports, fashion and food industries have been toppled one by one, as accounts of their predatory, abusive behaviour have emerged. Second-wave feminist calls to recognize rape and sexual harassment as endemic social problems are being publicly acknowledged in this 21st century cultural moment in ways previously unimaginable. As B. Ruby Rich notes of the reports of sexual harassment now publicly circulating in the mainstream on a daily basis: “Never has the gender binarism of power been so starkly on view” (2018).

However optimistically - or cynically - one might respond to the current public exposure of longstanding feminist insights about gender and power, what is undisputed is that this moment of “mass disclosure”, in which the media spotlight is trained on sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, demands careful feminist analysis and response. The hashtag #metoo may not be the first “feminist meme event” (Thrift 2014) of its kind, but there is no question that its cultural resonance and reach is unparalleled. The aim of this special Commentary & Criticism is to provide a forum for feminist media scholars to begin to take stock of this post Weinstein moment. The use of the phrase “post Weinstein” requires clarification. The struggles of abuse and harassment brought to cultural attention through the vilification of Weinstein as a singular monster are far from over; indeed, there is a much longer history to the systematic abuses of white patriarchy that are now being so vocally discussed as part of the “Weinstein effect.” To be clear: we are using the phrase “post Weinstein” to signal the cultural fall-out from the Weinstein revelations, and to foreground the need to contend with this particular cultural moment as one fraught with both great promise – and peril – for feminist media scholars concerned with interrogating gendered, racialized and classed power relations in the media industries. Though this feels like a watershed moment, it is important to proceed with caution and determination, and to not assume that the new visibility of feminist arguments about gendered inequality in the workplace will necessarily lead to the long-term structural changes so desperately needed. So far, the emphasis on charitable legal funds, changing the face of those in power (e.g. more women CEOs etc), and better corporate policies remains contained by a postfeminist sensibility that “is not disruptive” and is “capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy friendly” (Gill 2018, 618)

If this is, however, a cultural turning point, a “mass reckoning with sexual harassment” (Grant 2018, 299), then it is vital that we carefully unpack the systemic and institutionalized histories that continue to produce and sustain the conditions for gendered power imbalances and oppression. As historian Stephanie Coontz has argued, we must move beyond “salacious details” of individual stories and the focus on individual men, in order to “ask why women previously did not feel that they were in a position to admit [harassment and assault]. It’s not just because we’ve been socialized to be accommodating and spare people’s feelings. It’s because we lack protections and power in the workforce” (Reese and Coontz 2018, 40).

In the essays selected for this special Commentary & Criticism, the authors grapple with the complexities of this post Weinstein moment and remind us of the ever important need to historicize and contextualize. Even as feminist scholars are galvanized by the #metoo movement, the six essays collected here examine its potential limitations and suggest the importance of keeping the lines of critical interrogation open. Stefania Marghitu’s essay focuses on “auteur apologism,” evaluating how the long-term feminist interest in the relationship between auteurism and misogynist violence has been given renewed attention in the controversies surrounding Woody Allen, Roman Polanski and Louis C.K. That the auteurs discussed by Marghitu are white men is significant: other essays in this volume argue that it is imperative to explore why, despite the inclusionary rhetoric around #metoo, the question of race is a “constitutive omission” in public conversations on gender, power, harassment and assault (Snead 1994, 8). As Patricia Davis’ essay reminds us, even as we watch a number of powerful men fall, there is a need to question how the careers of other alleged abusers are allowed to thrive, as is the case with the continued success of black R & B performer R. Kelly. Gendered and racialized discourses are also salient to discussion of the recent appointment of black female attorney and academic Anita Hill as Head of the Hollywood Commission on sexual violence. While Hill’s appointment is important because of the historical resonances with her own past experiences of harassment, Jennifer Asenas and Sierra Abrams’s essay shows how the media tends to dehistoricize or “flatten” Hill’s story of resistance.

While celebrities have played an important role in sustaining media attention and building momentum for #metoo - from the tweets of individual actors such as Alyssa Milano, Rose Gowan and Reese Witherspoon, to the publicity garnered from statements (fashion and otherwise) made at glamorous awards ceremonies, to the Time’s Up letter of solidarity - feminist scholars must be careful not to “centre cisgender women’s experience of harassment and assault” (Talusan 2017) in ways that marginalize and exclude others, including trans and gender nonbinary people. There are unique challenges facing gender nonconforming individuals working in the media industries as discussed in freelance journalist Danielle Corcione’s essay on what it means to work in precarity without legal protections against sexual harassment. Finally, just as it is important to deploy an intersectional analysis in order to avoid exclusionary gestures, so too it is crucial that a global stance is brought to bear upon the question of gendered power and harassment in the media industries. To this end, Inge Sorensen’s and Jinsook Kim’s essays look beyond Hollywood to the operations of gendered power in other film and media industries, South Korea and Denmark, respectively. As their essays demonstrate, the post Weinstein reckoning reverberates far and wide: there are key lessons to be learned regarding how other industries - in other countries - work to contest inequity and advance meaningful structural change.

**References**

Farrow, Ronan. 2017. “From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein’s Accusers Tell Their Stories.” October 23rd, *The New Yorker,* https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories

Gill, Rosalind. 2017. “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility Ten Years On.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 20.6: 606-626.

Grant, Melissa Gira. 2018. “The Unsexy Truth About Harassment.” In *Where Freedom Starts: Sex Power Violence #MeToo A Verso Report*. London: Verso: 296-307.

Kantor, Jodi and Megan Twohey. 2017. “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.” October 17th, *The New York Times*,<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html>.

Reese, Hope and Stephanie Coontz. 2018. “#MeToo is Powerful but Will Fail Unless We Do More.” In *Where Freedom Starts: Sex Power Violence #MeToo A Verso Report*. London: Verso, 35-49.

Rich, Ruby B. 2018. “She Can Do It.” *Film Quarterly*. 71.3, Spring. https://filmquarterly.org/2018/02/28/she-can-do-it/

Snead, James. 1994. *white screen/black images: Hollywood from the Dark Side.* Edited by Colin MacCabe and Cornel West. New York & London: Routledge.

Talusan, Meredith. 2017. “How #MeToo Stands to Marginalize Trans and Gender-Nonconforming People.” October 27th, *them*, https://www.them.us/story/how-metoo-stands-to-marginalize

Thrift, Samantha. 2014. “#YesAllWomen As Feminist Meme Event.” *Feminist Media Studies*. 14.6: 1090-1092.