

CHAPTER TWO

POWER PLAYS

It was no secret in Hollywood that Harvey Weinstein, an influential movie producer, did not like to be told no. He was a powerful man who had the authority to make or break an actor's career. According to some accusers, he could do whatever he wanted. And allegedly, he did. For years no one went public with their claims.

Until October 5, 2017.

That day the *New York Times* published an article by investigative journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, exposing allegations of sexual abuse by Weinstein that spanned three decades. A few days later, in the *New Yorker* magazine, Ronan Farrow published the accounts of thirteen women who alleged that Weinstein sexually assaulted them. The stories, told by actors, models, and Weinstein Company employees, had striking similarities. Many reported that Weinstein insisted that they meet him in his hotel room. When they arrived, they alleged that he was nearly naked, demanding massages and sexual acts. He offered to boost their careers in Hollywood if they did what he asked, and his accusers alleged that he threatened to ruin them if they refused. Actors Mira Sorvino and Ashley Judd claim he blacklisted them when they wouldn't give in to his sexual demands. Salma Hayek alleged that he threatened to kill her. Uma Thurman thinks he might actually have tried to arrange an "accident" on the set of the 2003 movie *Kill Bill*. In the following months, more than fifty women accused Weinstein of threatening behavior and sexual assault.

As these accusations against Weinstein came to light, actor Alyssa Milano wanted to know about the experiences of women outside of Hollywood. She tweeted, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." Within hours the internet exploded with social media posts bearing the hashtag #MeToo. Women and girls shared story after story of being catcalled and pursued, being groped and grabbed, being assaulted and violated. The sheer number of stories was overwhelming. Online, some people asked if there were any women who had not been harassed or assaulted in some way. The silence was shocking.

#MeToo

"As a sixth grader, a group of boys held me against a wall as they pulled up my shirt to "see if I stuffed my bra with Charmin or Bounty." The boys barely got a slap on the wrist but I was socially ostracized because I "couldn't take a joke."

—@CatMilsपो, Twitter, October 15, 2017

"And I was blamed for it. I was told not to talk about it. I was told that it wasn't that bad. I was told to get over it."

—@najwazebian, Twitter, October 16, 2017

"When I was a young lawyer, sexual harassment was an all-too common experience. It is a daily reality for many women."

—@KateBrownForOR, Twitter, October 18, 2017

"If you really love me, you'll do it." If, like me, you thought/think that's normal and feeling hesitant and uncomfortable comes with being in a relationship . . . it doesn't. You deserve better. Your feelings are valid. Not being ready is ok."

—@GrapheqDesign, Twitter, October 18, 2017

"I was raped at 15 by a relative. 5 years before he had raped my older cousin, but no one believed her because she was 'fast.'"

—@The_Wilde_Chick, Twitter, October 18, 2017

"Really going to speak up. My rapist/abuser was my boyfriend at the time. Took me years to accept what it actually was."

—@scrappysheppard, Twitter, October 18, 2017

"As an undocumented woman when it happened, I felt like I could not speak up. What if I get in trouble? I thought."

—@julissaarce, Twitter, October 18, 2017

"I was raped when I was 14 and I've told no one about it because I'm a man and she's a woman and no one would've taken me seriously."

—@Geisterwand, Twitter, October 15, 2017

WHO HAS THE UPPER HAND?

Harvey Weinstein was not the only well-known and powerful man that the #MeToo movement called out for alleged sexual assault. Many survivors in the United States and Europe came forward to accuse journalists, politicians, comedians, actors, directors, radio personalities, judges, pastors, TV commentators, celebrity chefs, conductors, corporate leaders, and other prominent men of sexual harassment and assault. It seemed as if the problem was everywhere.

Perpetrators of sexual violence are able to exert their will upon their victims because they are more powerful than their victims. This power is partly physical, but it also comes from the perpetrators' positions of economic power and public influence. When people hold power, they are less likely to be challenged and held accountable for their behavior. In her 1975 book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, journalist Susan Brownmiller wrote, "All rape is an exercise in power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress [resolve] her grievance. Rape in slavery and in wartime are two such examples. But rapists may also operate within an emotional setting or within a dependent relationship that provides a hierarchical, authoritarian [one dominant person in charge] structure of its own that weakens a victim's resistance, distorts her perspective and confounds her will." As one of Weinstein's accusers put it, "The balance of power is me: 0; Harvey Weinstein: 10."

In most societies of the world, women are the usual targets of predatory men. This is because most cultures are grounded in patriarchy, a form of social organization that puts the majority share of power in the hands of men. Patriarchy views men as superior and women as inferior, with no claim to basic rights. Historically, that meant—and in some societies still means—that wealth, privilege, position, land, and name passed through male family members.

Tarana Burke: “I See You, I Hear You”

In 1996 Tarana Burke was the director of a youth camp for improving the lives of young people. One day a girl at the camp asked to speak with her privately. When they sat down, the girl told Burke that she was being sexually abused by her mother’s boyfriend. This revelation triggered Burke’s memories of her own sexual assault. It was so upsetting that Burke stopped the conversation and told the girl she should tell her story to someone else. Recalling this moment, Burke said, “I watched her walk away from me as she tried to recapture her secrets and tuck them back into their hiding place. I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone and I couldn’t even bring myself to whisper . . . me too.”

The interaction continued to haunt Burke. Ten years later in 2007, she launched a movement called Me Too. Her goal was to support women of color like her who are survivors of abuse. She explains it this way: “On the one side, [saying ‘Me Too’ is] a bold declarative statement that ‘I’m not ashamed’ and ‘I’m not alone.’ On the other side, it’s a statement from survivor to survivor that says ‘I see you, I hear you, I understand you and I’m here for you.’”

Burke went on to become the program director for Girls for Gender Equity, a nonprofit based in Brooklyn, New York, that works to eliminate racial and gender inequities facing girls of color. In 2017 she watched as the momentum of #MeToo exploded. When *Time* magazine announced its Person of the Year in December 2017, the distinction did not go to a single person. It went to a group whom *Time* called *The Silence Breakers: The Voices That Launched a Movement*. Those voices included Tarana Burke, Alyssa Milano, Terry Crews, and the many others who spoke out about sexual abuse under the hashtag #MeToo.



Tarana Burke speaks at the #MeToo Survivors March & Rally on November 12, 2017, in Hollywood, California. Burke is the activist who gave the MeToo movement its name.

A woman's role was to obey the men in her life, to bear children, and to care for them. Until the twentieth century in the United States and other Western societies, daughters were considered property, owned by their fathers, and transferred to their husbands through marriage. Wives facing domestic violence had no legal protections. They couldn't refuse to have sex with their husbands, and they couldn't file for divorce. They couldn't own and control property or pass it to their children. They couldn't go to school or earn and manage their own money. They couldn't vote or hold positions in government.

FIGHTING FOR SHARED POWER

For centuries, power remained in the hands of men. This didn't begin to change in the United States until the mid-nineteenth century with the birth of the modern feminist movement (also called the women's rights movement) at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. At this meeting, more than three hundred people, mostly women, gathered to discuss the role of women in society. They also considered the Declaration of Sentiments, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) along with Lucretia Mott (1793–1880), Martha Wright (1806–1875), and Mary Ann McClintock (1795–1884). This document stated that “the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations [taking away rights by force] on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object [goal] the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” It went on to detail all the rights that were denied to women and concluded, “Because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they [women] have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.”

One hundred people signed their names to the Declaration of Sentiments, including Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), a black writer, activist, and statesman. He saw that the oppression of black Americans and the oppression of women were connected. In spite of



Civil rights attorney and advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw attends the Busboys and Poets' Peace Ball: Voices of Hope and Resistance. It took place at the National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, DC, in 2017.

this, the women's rights movement of the 1900s ignored the needs of people of color for most of the century.

In 1989 US civil rights attorney and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to describe how gender discrimination and racial discrimination overlap and interact. She describes intersectionality as “a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power.” Since the 1980s, intersectionality has come to include sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and social class, in addition to race.

In the simplest definition, feminism is the belief that all genders should have equal access to political, economic, and social power. Extending that idea, intersectional feminism acknowledges that gender equality can't exist unless other imbalances of power are also dismantled. Crenshaw says that it is critical “to sustain a vision of social justice that recognizes the ways racism, sexism, and other inequalities work together to undermine us all.”

UNDER THREAT OF ASSAULT

The most privileged and powerful people in most societies are rich, white, able-bodied, heterosexual, and cisgender (when gender identity matches biological sex). Power is at the heart of abuse and assault, so

people from marginalized groups (those with less power in society) are more likely to be victims of abuse and sexual assault. The National Crime Victimization Survey and the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence

Survey, both conducted in 2010, documented these differences. For example, American Indian women are sexually assaulted more than twice as often as white women. People with disabilities are sexually assaulted at more than three times the rate of nondisabled people. Gay men and bisexual people are sexually assaulted more than twice as often as lesbians and heterosexual people. And according to the 2015 US Transgender Survey, nearly 50 percent of transgender people will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime.

“Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”

—bell hooks, author and activist, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, 2000

Thanks, Wonder Woman!

Merriam-Webster dictionary editors selected *feminism* as the 2017 Word of the Year. It was the most frequent lookup on the dictionary website. Searches for the term spiked in response to several important national events that year. On January 21, 2017, the Women’s March on Washington, DC, drew nearly one million protesters. They demanded gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence and harassment. More than seven million people participated in sister marches around the world.

On April 26, 2016, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a television show based on the 1985 Margaret Atwood novel of the same name, premiered on Hulu. This dystopian drama about women forced into sexual and childbearing slavery raised critical questions about women’s rights in modern-day America. On June 2, 2017, the movie *Wonder Woman*, starring Gal Gadot and directed by Patty Jenkins, opened in the United States. One of the highest-grossing movies of the year, it included an iconic scene of Wonder Woman fighting her way across No Man’s Land, which became a rallying cry for feminists.

These Guys Are Wild Feminists

During the 2016 US presidential campaign, an audio recording of Republican candidate Donald Trump was released to the media. In it he bragged about sexually assaulting women by grabbing them in the crotch and kissing them against their will. Supporters came to his defense, saying that this kind of “locker room talk” was common among men and didn’t mean anything. Debate around the country was heated. Many Americans strongly disagreed that bragging about assault is something to ignore.

Six Americans who disagreed were male student-athletes from a high school in Oregon. They took a stance by posting a photo of themselves in T-shirts from the company Wildfang that said *Wild Feminist*. One of the young men, Rhys Atkinson, said, “It’s very important to speak out about [Trump’s bragging], because it has to be known that there are men out there that support women and women’s rights. . . . Everyone deserves the same rights, and it’s not fair that women can be degraded through speech or actions.”

Because of systemic racism, ableism, and homophobia (fear or hatred of gay people), law enforcement agencies and the legal system often take crimes committed against people in these marginalized groups less seriously. Victims from marginalized groups know this and are less likely than straight white women to turn to the criminal justice system after a sexual assault. A black woman might fear that police will target and racially profile men in their communities. An undocumented immigrant might be afraid of deportation. A transgender sex worker might fear being further victimized. A poor person may not be able to afford a skilled attorney to represent her in court. Societal prejudices can mean that justice is not equally accessible to all people. For that reason, many people do not feel safe reporting a sex crime, and they may not trust that they will be dealt with fairly.

#METOO IS NOT JUST FOR WOMEN

Actor and former National Football League player Terry Crews knows all about how marginalization plays a role in sexual assault. In the midst of the Weinstein scandal, Crews spoke out on Twitter:

This whole thing with Harvey Weinstein is giving me PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. Why? Because this kind of thing happened to ME. My wife n I were at a Hollywood function last year n a high level Hollywood executive came over 2 me and groped my privates. Jumping back I said What are you doing?! My wife saw everything n we looked at him like he was crazy. He just grinned like a jerk. . . . I decided not 2 take it further becuz I didn't want 2b ostracized — par

4 the course when the predator has power n influence. I let it go. And I understand why many women who this happens to let it go. Who's going 2 believe you? (few) What r the repercussions? (many) Do u want 2 work again? (Yes) R you prepared 2b ostracized? (No).



Terry Crews attends a charitable event in Los Angeles, California. Crews has spoken publicly about his own experiences as the victim of sexual harassment. In the fall of 2018, Crews settled a lawsuit with the Hollywood agent who had abused him.

Terry Crews is a large, physically tough person. Some wondered why he didn't just punch the man. In an interview on *Good Morning America*, shortly after posting his tweet, Crews explained that as a black man in America, if he responded with physical force he would have been seen as a thug. Crews knew that if he had been white, he could perhaps have responded differently. But the man who assaulted him was a powerful, white film executive, so the risks were too high. Crews faced two key power differentials: The first was race. The second was that his abuser had so much power in the movie business that he could damage Crews's career.

"People need to be held accountable," said Crews during the *Good Morning America* interview. "It's an abuse of power. . . . This guy is one of the most powerful men in Hollywood. And he looked at me at the end [after he had groped Crews] as if to say *Who's going to believe you?* I understand why [women] won't come forward. . . . When a person of power breaks that boundary [of personal space and safety], violates that boundary, you are a prisoner of war. . . . I had to tell my story so that other people could be free [to tell their stories too]."

A NEW DAY

Shortly after the allegations against Harvey Weinstein surfaced, celebrities gathered in Beverly Hills, California, at the 2018 Golden Globe Awards to celebrate international and American achievements in film and television. But they did more than talk about movies.

A group of influential women in Hollywood used this platform to launch a movement called Time's Up in collaboration with social justice activists including Tarana Burke, the creator of the #MeToo hashtag. Time's Up declares, "The clock has run out on sexual assault, harassment and inequality in the workplace. It's time to do something about it." In an open letter signed by several hundred Hollywood stars, the women of Time's Up expressed their intentions, saying, "We also want all victims and survivors to be able to access justice and support



Oprah Winfrey accepted the 2018 Cecil B. DeMille Award during the Golden Globe Awards in January 2018 in Beverly Hills, California. She used the moment to speak movingly and forcefully in support of the #MeToo movement.

for the wrongdoing they have endured. We particularly want to lift up the voices, power, and strength of women working in low-wage industries where the lack of financial stability makes them vulnerable to high rates of gender-based violence and exploitation.”

One of the women involved in Time’s Up is actor and media superstar Oprah Winfrey. She gave a powerful speech during the Golden Globe Awards, saying of the #MeToo movement, “A new day is on the horizon! And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women . . . and some pretty phenomenal men, [who are] fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say ‘me too’ again.”