

ACLW'S 2018 LEADING ISSUES JOURNAL



3/8/2018

Special Edition. 2018 International Women's Day
Editor: Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey

In light of the outpouring of sexual harassment allegations in Australia and abroad in 2017, three students from the Illawarra in NSW who were awarded for their essays in ACLW's 2017 IWD Essay Competition were invited in January 2018 to share their thoughts and reactions to the outpouring. This special edition features their essays for this Journal and historically records their significant insights in their understanding of the watershed 'silence breaking' voices and moments of 2017, the emergent global movements and their own course of advocacy and action.

AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE
FOR
LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN PTY LTD
WWW.LEADERSHIPFORWOMEN.COM.AU

ACLW

Caterina Loss:

“why, in spite of all of the news coverage, in spite of the articles, interviews and evidence supplied by the victims, in spite of women telling them time and time again; why do people still believe that sexism is not an issue in the western world?”

Amar Sultan:

“...the change that is to come runs deeper than stories of women in high-powered industries, in fact, we must also pay attention to women’s experiences in blue-collar occupations. The stories of women of colour, discriminated as minorities and sexualised as women, are too often dismissed.”

Rebecca Ryan-Brown:

“To think that there have been so many cases where men have abused their position to take advantage of women sexually is terrifying, but the most unnerving factor is the way that women have felt forced to remain silent, until now”.



Caterina Loss

Caterina Loss is a loud and proud teen feminist from the Illawarra. She firmly believes in intersectional change for the better, and tries to live her life by the principles of equality and justice. Last year she had the honour of winning the ACLW's Illawarra International Women's Day essay competition, and ever since her love for activism has increased. After immigrating to Australia when she was 10 years old, she has discovered many new opportunities and inspirations, each of which she is very grateful for. Caterina is currently the secretary of her school and aims to increase her involvement within the community and the outside world.

Harvey Weinstein. Some months ago, this man was a successful Hollywood producer. Now he is known as a sexual predator. Women have been telling the world about sexual assault since the beginning of time, and in response to their allegations they have been labeled gold diggers, sluts, and tarts whose sole purpose in life is to defame the good name of kind reasonable men with their petty slander.

At first, I felt ecstatic upon hearing this unfortunate yet needed news; finally, a major sexual predator would be outed and outcast in Hollywood. Other women would gain the courage to report their own experiences and, upon hearing of Weinstein's comeuppance, victims of sexual assault might be encouraged to speak up and act against their perpetrators. Then came Kevin Spacey. Personally, this came as a shock - Kevin Spacey had acted in countless movies and TV shows - before October, I and many had regarded Spacey as a charismatic and well respected man. However, after 15 separate claims of assault, it is hard to ignore the fact that Kevin Spacey is also sexual predator. The entire month of October was reserved for talk of the growing list of predators in Hollywood. Instead of discussing which celebrity they would dress up as this Halloween, people were arguing which celebrity would be outed as a rapist next. November and December also followed in a similar fashion.

Now it's 2018 and we still haven't finished unmasking the predators that live in our TV, our magazines, and our neighborhoods. What first sparked an excitement in me as an ugly, yet needed progression of equality in Hollywood and the larger world has turned into rage. Instead of ending, this situation has grown uglier and more disheartening by the minute. It has dragged on for months

- over 100 of Hollywood's men in high positions have been accused of sexual assault as of November.

These considerable events have created in me a great need for answers. For lack of a better word; why? Why has it taken so long for men in powerful positions to acknowledge that this sort of blatant sexism-fueled behavior exists? Why now? Previously other 'big players' have been accused of sexual assault, and yet only now is the world reacting to the 'Weinstein Effect'. Why haven't all of these men been officially examined and then punished for their behaviour? And the most important question; the series of words that have been brewing on the tip of my tongue since this charade of a 'persecution' began; **why, in spite of all of the news coverage, in spite of the articles, interviews and evidence supplied by the victims, in spite of women telling them time and time again; why do people still believe that sexism is not an issue in the western world?**

The answer to that question is long and complicated. Attempting to dismantle the western world's need for feminism is not a new phenomenon by any means - when discussing sexism in any form, the argument is practically bound to be interrupted with a 'men get raped too' or a 'you should focus on the women in Iraq'. **The answer to why, both the undermining of feminism and the disbelief of sexism in western society is so common, is simple and plain; it is convenient.** It is so much easier to claim ignorance in the face of systematic oppression when the system favours you. The same people who pretend to care deeply about male rape and female oppression in Iraq only voice their opinions when faced with a personal critique - they barely research their arguments, let alone invest time and effort advocating for their supposed causes. These people only use their arguments as a crutch to silence feminism at their convenience.

The Weinstein Effect has brought many issues to light, most importantly the misuse of power and the systematic silencing of and against women in Hollywood and the world as a whole. It has opened a can of worms that cannot and will not be ignored any longer. We must refuse to let men silence our opinions and collective suffering for their own convenience. Their time is up. Although by all accounts Weinstein was a lecherous creep who contributed nothing to the women rights movement, he did inadvertently assist with conquering one large patriarchal obstacle: now we see the truth. **Now we're listening.**

≈



Amar Sultan

Amar Sultan is an 18 year old high school graduate from Wollongong entering her first year of a Bachelor of Laws and International Studies at the University of Wollongong in 2018. Growing up, she was surrounded by a family who greatly supported her education and growth in the academic and cultural aspects of life. Thus, her interest in global topics of conversation began from an early age as she observed the various studies and professional occupations of her relatives that instilled in her a need to know more about her environment and what she could do for it.

In 2017, she took part in ACLW's essay writing competition for International Women's day where she won 2nd place. She comments, "This was an extremely valuable experience for me as it was the first time I felt part of such an important cause where I could voice my opinions and be genuinely listened to. Since then, I have made an effort to take as many opportunities that arise in my life, knowing that they will only give me more courage, knowledge and determination."

Amar aspires to utilise her knowledge of languages such as Arabic and French, and the skills from her law degree, to work with international organisations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International. Whilst she is aware that her next five years at University will come with their own challenges, she is excited to learn, meet new people and carve the pathway toward her future.

Socrates said it best when he observed that, "the secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new". While a change in terms of the equal treatment and education of individuals and communities on the matter of sexual assault is overdue, society is clearly only in the infant stages of what seems to be a cultural revolution. In recent months, a cascade of sexual harassment accusations against powerful men has put the public at a crossroads in the fight against sexism. On first impressions, I believe that people and particularly young women like myself were overcome with disgust, but also, strangely enough, a newfound sense of empowerment as the victimisation of powerful celebrities shows that no person is immune.

Nonetheless, I relate to the hardships of the many male and female victims of abuse with great compassion, though I know that we never completely get over great torments. **We can however absorb them, using them to carve us into stronger and often kinder creatures. We can choose to take the harassment and assault claims seriously, and recognise our country, our world has serious problems with basic respect for equal rights, and take steps to transform**

our political culture. Or we can ignore the countless allegations made by victims as nothing more than 'identity politics elitism' or the 'fabrications of the melodramatic or egotistical few'. Nevertheless, ignorance is a handicap that cripples us all; so to engage in the second choice would be a serious mistake considering the available evidence of mass sexism. Furthermore, I have the strongest belief that by being neutral in such situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. **Therefore, the change that is to come runs deeper than stories of women in high-powered industries, in fact, we must also pay attention to women's experiences in blue-collar occupations. The stories of women of colour, discriminated as minorities and sexualised as women, are too often dismissed.**

It is important to consider the fact that revolutions don't spring overnight, and history doesn't unfold in a straight line. Every person who has taken the courageous step of coming forward with her or his story of rape, abuse, or harassment has lit a candle in the darkness where sexual predators hide, and the lumens from the #MeToo uprising are so bright only the willfully blind can't see the scope of the problem. **The solution, however, is hard to pinpoint, as sexual abuse is systemic, not singular. Stopping it requires men to speak up and stand up to other men. It requires acknowledging that there's no such thing as "locker room talk." It requires believing women so that it doesn't take 20 years for them to feel safe enough to share their experiences.** Day to day, the infuriating picture of male dominance is so clearly put before me that it is hard to look away when even in sexual misconduct cases where men are held accountable, it takes 6, 7 or more female voices of "he did it" to override one male voice of "I didn't". By the same token, the constant badgering by people sceptical of victims who don't report is absurd as some women are simply not believed and become stigmatised wherein a 'dirty little secret' becomes the scarlet letter R of shame that is forever worn. I'm aware that, in situations such as these, it's easy to give up using the excuse that our world is and always will be cruel, bigoted and harsh; however, I refuse to entertain negativity. Life is too big and time is too short to squander in misery and self-pity. And whilst the road seems long and winding, I know that at the heart of each limiting belief and resistance lies a hidden reward. That is, if one is able to cross that barrier of fear.

I wouldn't say that seeing all the reports of sexual assault dominating the news cycle galvanizes me into action at all, but **I know that giving up isn't an option right now as the years of silence and blind eyes on the matter are over. We have to fight back; for ourselves and for young girls and boys who are growing up into a world that doesn't seem to respect their rights as individuals.** Whilst I am emboldened, I am not naïve enough to accustom myself to the elusive hope that this matter will be dealt with easily, as I know it will take generations to truly fix the way the

powers of the world are wielded. The aim, of course, is for the neglect of victims and malicious ignorance of offenders to be eradicated so that future generations can thrive in a world in which respect, reverence and acceptance is given to all human beings regardless of gender, ethnicity, orientation or status.

≈



Rebecca Ryan-Brown

Rebecca Ryan-Brown is 17 years old. Rebecca would like to study a Bachelor of Arts/Law in Deakin University when she completes her HSC.

Rebecca comments: "I would like to think my most notable features are my good looks, charm and charisma but in reality I am would like to be known for my strong beliefs and standing up for what I believe in. Some might describe me as opinionated, I prefer passionate. The topics I discuss need to be addressed and once I finish high school I wish to do this myself. I hope to complete a

degree in Arts/Law so I can fulfill my love of creative writing and history whilst entering the legal profession. I strive towards this career so I am able to make a difference in the lives of others. Within family and international law, the two disciplines that appeal to me most, I believe there are a number of inequalities that must be addressed. Equality for both men and women in a court of law where the custody and care of children is under discussion and as someone raised by a single mother I know how impactful a single parent can be on a child. Human rights are a fundamental issue in the global community where international law is vital in making any kind of positive change. International relations have always fascinated me and I found adopting a worldly perspective allows me to comprehend the goings on of the world around me and I wish to be a part of it. International law and its delegates are a key part of foreign relations between countries and I believe they are a necessity for the progression of our world. The world is going through a number of social changes and I believe it is so important to be amongst it."

I have just turned 17, this means in a year's time I'll have transcended into adulthood and be trying to find a job in the real world. This idea is already terrifying enough without the added fear of sexual harassment in the workplace. Recently there have been accusations made by a staggering amount

of women in numerous fields of work, where public figures have been accused of sexual assault and harassment. This makes finding a career so much more intimidating, especially when females are already so significantly less prominent than men in some industries. **To think that there have been so many cases where men have abused their position to take advantage of women sexually is terrifying, but the most unnerving factor is the way that women have felt forced to remain silent, until now.**

This problem that women face has existed for generations, contrary to what some believe sexual assault claims aren't just some new fad and victims are not just jumping on the bandwagon. I am proud to witness the international revolution against the archaic issue of sexual harassment. An issue which should never have arisen has now been dragged into the international spotlight for all to see. Stemming from Harvey Weinstein allegations, where over 80 women made claims of sexual misconduct against him, there has been an uproar in accusations of rape against famous male figures. Hollywood may seem worlds away, yet these predators are riddled throughout so many women's lives. Writing this I look to my left and there lies a Chuck Close print plastered to my wall, to my right a collection of Kevin Spacey films - men I once respected who now make repulsion flow through me. Their presence in the film and art worlds is what makes equality for women so much more difficult to achieve.

The Hollywood film industry has been deeply impacted by many well-known names being accused, there have been a number of apologies made and distinctive changes to careers. The reactions of both Netflix and Ridley Scott to Kevin Spacey's sexual misconduct are most notable. Both, the TV show House of Cards and the film All the Money in the World have removed Spacey's role. This is an important step as it shows a lack of tolerance for sexual misconduct and how such offenders should be dealt with. Robin Wright has been confirmed to play the lead character in the upcoming season, which is a progressive sign for women in not just Hollywood but all professions. The sheer amount of sexual abuse allegations has led to an increase in male victims' capability to speak out about their experiences. Terry Crews was one of the first males in Hollywood to voice his past concerning an agent taking advantage of him sexually. As a male, Crews admitted to feeling fear of the receivable backlash stemming from ideals of masculinity. This stigma is restricting both of the sexes from achieving true justice for sexual assault victims. Crews was recognised as a "Silence Breaker" of the #MeToo movement, an online campaign that has encouraged victims to share their stories.

Australian celebrities have also been accused of abusing their position of power. Claims of sexual harassment sitting on our doorstep, affecting the lives of Australian women in all industries. Craig

McLachlan, an icon of Australian theatre and television has been accused of misconduct in both areas, as a part of 'The Doctor Blake Mysteries' series and the stage show the 'Rocky Horror Show'. In a week for complaints had been made concerning his misconduct on both sets. McLachlan later released an anecdote of Molly Meldrum has been described as both "unapologetic" and "boastful".

Research has shown that on average 5% of rape allegations are falsified, whilst 75% of workplace harassment incidents go unreported. These statistics are sad reflections of women's position in society, but it has also come to light that men fall victim to the same sexual assault crimes and this should be noted. The invalidation of men's sexual assault claims occurs all too often due to the pressure applied by both modern and traditional gender roles. Sexual misconduct is an issue faced all too often and if we are to prevent future generations experiencing the issues of harassment and abuse, we must utilise the platform we have been given.

The "Silence Breakers" were collectively recognised as the Time Person of the Year, the #MeToo hashtag made notable by activist Tarana Burke and actress Alyssa Milano. 12 million posts were made by 4.7 million people in the first 24 hours alone. Consequently, the #hertoo movement has been developed by UNICEF to aid young girls who are not privileged to the same voice as those in more developed countries. This is a vital step away from "white feminism" as it deals with problematic issues such as cultural disrespect for women. On our shores, the Australian music industry has proved to have its own sexual predators, leading to the #meNOmore campaign. **These online campaigns may seem inconsequential to some but the publicity raised and span it reaches has lead to unprecedented social action for victims of sexual assault of all genders and this couldn't have come soon enough.** Society is making astounding progress in fighting for rights of the victim thanks to the role of social media and the connections it forms.

≈