

# Lineages of #MeToo and Hollywood Harassment

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On October 4, 2017 *The Hollywood Reporter* broke the story that Harvey Weinstein had lawyered up in advance of a big *New York Times* article. There was no question in my mind as to what was coming down the pipeline. Weinstein's history of harassment and assault was perhaps one of the worst kept secrets in Hollywood, although until October 2017 tales had only circulated through gossip and informal networks and had not been the subject of journalistic or scholarly inquiry. Journalists (such as Kim Masters) have grappled with the question of why it took so long for the Weinstein story to break when many had heard the rumors. Likewise, many media scholars also knew the contemporary stories and that casting couch scandals are as old as Hollywood itself. Hollywood's stories of harassment and assault existed in gossip and the margins of history, but the outpouring of new stories and evidence gives media scholars fodder to look back and interrogate how Hollywood makes women vulnerable. As we know, Weinstein was not alone in his behavior. The end of 2017 saw an outpouring of allegations and to list everyone would probably consume the full word count for this position paper. Some of these names were not surprising, while others were heartbreaking for fans. But the accumulated impact underscored the sheer volume of discrimination, harassment, and sexual assault, and clarified that these abuses are not anomalous - they are systemically enabled and have been integral to Hollywood's workplace culture and gendered power structure.

Rather than settling into the notion that "this is how it has always been," I would like this roundtable to consider the unique characteristics of Hollywood labor culture and infrastructure that have made women vulnerable to harassment and assault for decades. There are ample models of feminist media scholarship that put women's efforts, achievements, and contributions at the center of an analysis of Hollywood. There are still more women's histories to be told, for example, there were numerous attempts within the guilds to transform Hollywood hiring practices (although limited access to guild documents and records has meant that these have garnered less scholarly attention). Furthermore, works such as Mark Garrett Cooper's *Universal Women* and Jane Gaines's *Pink Slipped* ask questions about industrial culture and address what happened to the women working in the silent era. Yet we should still seek to broaden the conversations about women in Hollywood to address our scholarly blind-spots about workplace culture, industry, and labor, especially as they pertain to gendered power dynamics and industrial organization more broadly.

One of the conditions of Hollywood labor that I propose should receive more consideration is precarity or job insecurity, not simply as a condition of contemporary labor, but as a defining characteristic of Hollywood's labor throughout history. Studies of film history often privilege the order and efficiency of the (more or less) Fordist studio model, an approach that shapes our understanding of production power structures.

Precarity, which is well-theorized in cultural studies, political science, and work focused on digital media rarely features in historical discussions of labor. However, some political scientists have argued precarity has been the norm in the history of capitalism and Fordism was a brief anomaly. Those Hollywood workers who have always been in this vulnerable and barely-employed position fit the characterization of precarity as the norm. Among actors, stars and character actors enjoyed job stability during the studio system, but many others were only employed sporadically on freelance or short-term contracts (if they could find work at all). Precarity is unwieldy as a concept because people experience professional insecurity differently depending on their socio-economic background, family support network, competition within a field, and their unique career path. Job security, or the lack of it, influences when and how people can speak up about their working conditions – especially in an industry where power is disproportionately distributed to men.

The acceptance that self-sacrifice is a requirement of success, rules and institutional policies hinder creativity, success is not guaranteed, and that there are many career paths in the media industries are all truisms about Hollywood. These clichés about industry work make for poor definitions of “industry work” and confuse aspirants who are trying to sort out the rules of conducting business in the glamorous and fast-paced environment. When the behavioral norms and rules are loose or opaque, people with resources can maintain power and wield control how they see fit. As scholars, finding a historiographic approach to trace some of these lineages of mythmaking and locate the mechanisms of power is another way of understanding how we arrived at this watershed moment. Hollywood has been forced to examine and transform its own labor culture. We as media scholars should also be reorienting our own approaches toward labor histories and production cultures to understand the practices, structures, and policies that have enabled discrimination, harassment, and assault.