



Feb 3

The Weinstein Effect: From Hollywood to Austin

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In recent months, watching the news has become an exercise in endurance. How many times can one listen to story after story about sexual assault without becoming completely disheartened and cynical? The first overarching news narrative in 2018 has been centered on the many men and women who have traded silence for speech and have come forth with sexual assault allegations against some of the world's most powerful individuals.

This phenomenon, known as the Weinstein Effect after Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, who was among the first to be accused, first garnered attention in Hollywood. The most famed and beloved among the Hollywood elite became subject to strict scrutiny, namely Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., and more recently, Aziz Ansari.

Despite its Hollywood origins, the #TimesUp movement made sure to note that sexual assault is an issue that reaches women all across the country. The pioneers of the #TimesUp movement, some of Hollywood's leading women such as Reese Witherspoon, Eva Longoria, and Shonda Rhimes, made sure to include less-privileged women in their letter of solidarity. The letter includes a mention of these women, such as those working as janitors or in housekeeping jobs.

The recognition of privilege by these women is beyond admirable and commendable. However, when reading



power--from legislatures to boardrooms to executive suites and management to academia--lack gender parity and women do not have equal decision-making authority.”

Legislatures.

A word almost synonymous with the law and justice. Yet, story upon story began to reveal that this association wasn't as strong as previously thought. It wasn't a surprise, but it was a disappointment nonetheless.

The letter's claim is not without support, evidenced by this [video](#) from *The Texas Tribune* in which many female legislators speak out about the intertwining of the horrors of sexual assault and the Texas legislature.

Panelists included former state Senator and candidate for Governor Wendy Davis, State Representative Donna Howard (D-Austin), State Senator Joan Huffman (R-Houston), State Representative Ina Minjarez (D-San Antonio), and *The Daily Beast* reporter Olivia Messer.

At around moment 13:20 in the video, Wendy Davis says, “Women have been sensitized into believing that if we make a complaint or speak out against an experience that we went through, we are weak or are complaining.” She called it a “conditioning” and stated that women need a “reconditioning.”

Speaking about the legislature specifically, Representative Donna Howard said, “Those in Congress are beholden to the electorate but there is not a timely way for the electorate to weigh in on sexual assault (17:55).” The lack of inclusion of the electorate in the sexual assault reporting process in the Texas legislature poses a unique challenge to those in the state legislature who happen to be victims of sexual assault.

In an [article](#) she authored for *TribTalk*, Representative Howard claims that the Texas House of Representatives moved swiftly to create a sexual assault response plan:

“A December hearing was held to make necessary revisions following input from House members, including recommendations from a majority of women members who collectively pushed for greater transparency and accountability. Though it was fruitful, everyone involved recognized that this hearing was just the beginning; a special interim committee is expected to determine additional recommendations prior to the beginning of the 86th Legislative Session, which convenes in January 2019.”

It is important to note that the accused still have the ability to respond to sexual harassment claims against them, notes Senator Joan Huffman (21:54).

The planned policies still need work, as Howard notes in her article. “It still lacks details regarding the specifics of the investigation or enforcement,” she writes.

In regard to the accountability issue, Howard again mentions the existence of the electorate as the only body holding the accused accountable. Accountability only comes in the form of a required viewing of a sexual harassment video. The general public can view which legislators have undergone this type of training online. The primary purpose of this training is litigation avoidance rather than harassment prevention, according to Howard’s article.

Sexual assault is a widespread issue that has permeated our college campuses, doctors’ offices, workplaces, and now our state legislature. It is a sobering reminder of how much work is still left to done.

These tragedies have prompted a reflection on how we view women as a whole. Women in power, such as legislators, are no strangers to this reflection.

There is a sort of mysticism surrounding female politicians, especially those like former Senator Davis who are staunch supporters of women's rights and fight against the predominantly male status quo within politics. For young girls, these women are our role models. We start to believe that they are invincible.

But like any of us, these women can still fall prey to sexual violence.

The status of our elected officials as such places them in a different position than most of us in terms of how they can respond to and report sexual assault in the workplace. Per the nature of their occupations, the accused are held to different standards as well. Therefore, we must remember to include our senators and representatives in our discussions on sexual assault.

Culture

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