

Transcript of Masthead conference call with Megan Garber, Dec. 4, 2017

Matt Peterson: Hello there. I am Matt Peterson from the Masthead. Welcome to our regular series of conference calls with Atlantic writers and editors. Today, we are very lucky to have Megan Garber on the line. Megan writes about culture for The Atlantic, and for the past several weeks has been exhaustively detailing the sexual harassment revolution that has unfolded since the Harvey Weinstein accusations became public.

Megan, thank you for joining us.

Megan Garber: Hi, thanks for having me. So glad to be here.

Matt Peterson: Well, my pleasure. Before we get into it, I just want to quickly remind everybody how these calls work. First of all, this is all about your questions. I've collected a few that people sent it before the call, but we would love to take your calls in real time.

For everybody listening here, you can go to social.maestroconference.com to give us your questions, and there's a little chat window down at the lower left of your screen. You can click on that and click on the tab that says "everybody," and type your questions there. You can also email them to themasthead@theatlantic.com, and we will read them out as we go.

Alright. Let's get into this here. Megan, the first thing I want to ask you about is just this whole big phenomenon, and how big it is. It feels almost too big to talk about. I'm going to quote one of our members here, Ann, who wrote me that, "Below the surface of sexual harassment is an 'ism.'"

In other words, she's suggesting that there's one big thing that ties all of this together. Do you agree with that? Are we talking about one story here? Or is it a bunch of overlapping stories? How do you think about it?

Megan Garber: That's such a good question. Thanks for starting off with an easy one, Matt. I appreciate that.

Matt Peterson: Absolutely.

Megan Garber: I think it's a little bit of both, actually. I think it's so true that it very much is a phenomenon. I think one of the things I try to think about in my writing, and I have to say I want to do more of this going forward, but I want to try to think about this in terms of systems and networks, and not just discrete stories.

What are the phenomena that undergird everything that we're seeing, both historically and in the moment? I think there's a singularity in that respect, but I also think it's so many different, singularities overlapping, to use a terrible metaphor, but it's so many things happening at once.

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It's sexism, it's the women's movement. It's long-standing misogyny. It's social media, I think has a really big effect on the changes that we're seeing and this... exchanges are happening. It's really a bunch of stuff happening at once. But I definitely agree it's an overarching phenomenon that's happening.

Matt Peterson: Then what was it that made this able to happen now? Is it just a couple of journalists who have gotten lucky and got on to the Harvey Weinstein trial and managed to hit at the right time? Or is there some other set of conditions that made us receptive to these kinds of stories now?

Megan Garber: Yeah. I do think I really want to give the credit to the reporters both at the New York times and then at the New Yorker, Ronan Farrow's work there, because I do feel like they enabled so much of this to happen. That's just a testament to journalism. It's a testament to dogged journalism that sees a story and doesn't let up, even when there are so many pressures against that story coming to light. I think that's sort of the main things in this instance.

But then, there's also very much I think a longstanding anger at, for example, this is actually something I just wrote about this morning, the Access Hollywood tape, for example. When a lot of women in particular saw a man who was asking to become the leader of the country making these misogynistic comments, and caught on tape doing so. I think a lot of people thought, "Well, that's the end of his candidacy. The American people will not tolerate this level of misogyny in the man who wants to lead us," and then were disabused of that in November of last year.

I think that this sort of lingering anger and sense of indignation from that event helped to fuel a lot of the women who now came forward. They just kind of said, "Enough is enough."

I think that was part of it, too. I also, again, think social media really has played a really big part in these. We've seen this before, where there have been moments of recognized misogyny, and the term "sexual harassment" was coined in the '70s, to give name to what many women were experiencing at work.

We saw Anita Hill testifying in 1991, and that seeming to change things a little bit, and people thought, "Okay, well maybe now this is the moment when more equality is going to happen."

The narrative is that outrage from her testimony, and seeing the way she was treated by white, male members of congress fueled The Year of the Woman, where basically women wanting to have more representation in their government.

It's basically a lot of things, but I think that social media in particular has allowed for women's voices to be amplified and heard in a way that they couldn't be

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before. It's led people to feel that they have a community that they might not have felt that they had before. It's really a bunch of things all together.

Matt Peterson: You mentioned The Year of the Woman, and I'm curious if you see any signs that there's going to be another one of those. There's this well-documented Anita Hill effect, where after those allegations came to light, after the Supreme Court hearings, a record number of women ran for Congress after Anita Hill's testimony, right? If I'm remembering that correctly.

Megan Garber: Yep, yep, yep.

Matt Peterson: Are we seeing another Year of the Woman developing?

Megan Garber: I think in some ways. We've definitely seen women running for office at all levels, not just at national levels, but for their local school boards, and legislatures. They've said that they've been doing that explicitly in reaction to the Trump presidency. Not just Access Hollywood, but basically an agenda that many women see as anti-woman, and as regressive rather than progressive. There very much is part of that.

It's hard to know how much that will change things. The Year of the Woman was very much a relative idea, and it was sort of a media term. The Year of the Woman meant four more women in the Senate. I forget the exact numbers, but I think it was 47 in the House. The numbers were not anything really to be proud of at that point in history. I think we're still seeing great discrepancies in the number of representation in our government, considering that women are over 50% of the population. So, it's all relative I would say.

Matt Peterson: Yeah. I think one of the big themes that I see as I'm watching this unfold is this tension between phenomena like social media, which allowed more women to speak out, running into this deeper culture. You wrote this great essay after the Al Franken story about believing women. I'll read a quote from you where you wrote, "Me Too, and its celebration of women's agency, is fighting centuries' worth of ingrained beliefs about women's propensity to deceive, to manipulate, to doctor the picture."

So, we have social media on one hand, and you have centuries of ingrained culture. What do we watch for to know that the deeper culture is being changed by these forces?

Megan Garber: That's a great question. I think the first thing is the apologies that the men have been issuing. In one way, they've been so, I think, unsatisfying, at least for me, and feel kind of cynical. They often use the same language. "Well, I have a different recollection of events," or, "I was acting on what I thought were shared feelings."

All these words sort of recur. "Reckoning."

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"Disappointed to learn that I did this," or, "that she was made to feel this way," and all of that.

But I think the thing to remember in the broader historical scope is the fact that the men are apologizing at all is actually kind of a big deal. It's actually, that's a pretty recent phenomenon. I was listening to a podcast over the weekend that was talking about Grover Cleveland, who I did not know, but a woman alleged that he raped her, basically, and impregnated her through the rape. This was pretty much commonly known. The press figured it out, and it was part of the narrative of his campaign. He never apologized. It wasn't something that would even occur, it seemed like, to him to apologize for.

I think the norms are changing so quickly that now just the fact that we expect an apology. We expect them to say something for themselves. Even if this something they say is cynical in a lot of different ways, just the fact of saying something is progress. I think if you look at the language of those apologies, and parse what they are saying, there's something actually kind of constructive about that. Apologies are a good place to start.

Matt Peterson: Yeah. I want to jump into some member questions here. Let me ask one that a couple people have asked me, including Barbara, over on our live chat, who asked how deep this goes. Are the revelations, Barbara asks, are these revelations having any impact on women who work in less high-profile industries like hotel workers, service industries, and so on? Or is the change only happening if you're a sitting senator or a radio host or television host?

Megan Garber: I'm so glad to talk about this. Yes. I think it's a little bit of both, and I really hope, especially for The Atlantic, and for the media in general, that we'll do more reporting on other industries besides the most high-profile. Yeah, I do think women in the highest-profile areas are the ones who are recognizable. They're the ones who have the most obvious platforms.

But I think for any change to be meaningful, it's going to have to happen at all levels. I want to know the stories of the women in service industries, and I want to know the stories of women in basically every industry, because I think this is so widespread. I think that's what we're seeing. That this is such a phenomenon.

It feels almost like a weather system. It's just kind of everywhere in the ether, and I hope that especially in the new year we will move beyond just the women at the highest levels of politics, and just beyond the women in media, and really examine how women's lives at all levels are affected by this. And I should also say not just women. Men as well. I really do hope that we will see this even more as a system as we go forward.

Matt Peterson: You call it a weather system, and I like that metaphor. How do you ... this feels like it's all around us, and it's everywhere, and it's moving so fast. Let me ask a

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process question of you, which is, how do you pick and choose what you're going to write about when there's so much going on?

Megan Garber: Yes. It's a really good question, it's a live question. My editor and I talk about this all the time. We've thought about ways to sort of put it all into perspective. That might be looking at data journalism, for example, and really just looking at, for example, the language of apologies is one thing. Or just a way to get at the enormity of all this. We haven't, I don't think, found the perfect way. My solution in the meantime, having fallen fairly quickly into this beat, is just to, with every story that we do, try to add context and try to put it into a broader place in understanding.

In terms of choosing the stories, some you just, they're so big. Matt Lauer, who I wrote about last week, that was just a really big story. He's in, or he was in, the living rooms and the lives of so many Americans. Him going away from the screen was just such a big deal. So that was sort of a no-brainer. You find a way cover that, basically.

For other ones, usually I just decide based on whether I have something to add to the conversation beyond just the news. Because other outlets, big, do a great job of covering the news. I think for The Atlantic it's a matter of what sort of value add can we bring. That's basically how I choose the stories.

Matt Peterson: You mentioned the language of apologies. I'm curious. Which ones stand out to you as ... which have been the best apologies, which have been the worst?

Megan Garber: Oh, goodness. The thing is, they vary so much. Louis CK's, for example, where he was I think in some ways very honest about his behavior, felt kind of refreshingly not formulaic. It felt like he himself had written it, it wasn't vetted by a PR crisis consultant of anything like that. But at the same time it was very egocentric, I guess is the right way to put it.

He talked a lot about how, "Well, I just didn't realize how much these comedians just loved me, and I should have realized how much they loved me."

There was something a little bit grating about it, even in its honesty, and perhaps even because of its honesty. But it was revealing. So there was something sort of productive about that. I think maybe the worst would be the one that started them all, which is Harvey Weinstein, which referenced ... It was both very self-effacing and self-aggrandizing at the same time, and mentioned, "Well, I was born in a different age. I'm a dinosaur," and then referenced lyrics that were actually not existent.

It just sort of went off the rails a little bit, and I think lost sight of how important apologies are. And of course, this is at the very beginning of the story. It was before it came out how actually criminal and vile his behavior was. He sort of

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made light of, "Well, yeah, I maybe misbehaved a little bit. But I'm going to give money to women's causes," and all this kind of stuff.

Later, we find out the more sweeping extent of what he'd done, and it just reads even more disgustingly. Yeah.

Matt Peterson: I'm going to suggest a rule of thumb, which is that any apology that comes with a lawsuit is not completely serious.

Megan Garber: I think that's a good rule of thumb. Yes. And then actually, I would add one to that, though, which actually just came out last night, and in today's New York Times, which is Billy Bush's op-ed that's a little bit of an apology, a little bit of an explanation of his role in the Access Hollywood tape. It's also, I think, part of kind of a redemption tour that he's going to be embarking on. He's going to be on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert tonight. There will probably be other media appearances as he tries to rehabilitate his reputation.

What struck me about it was just how it emphasized how you can be both a victim of harassment and an agent of it at the same time, in the sense that it was Donald Trump making these terrible comments, and yet, Billy Bush was in a situation where he sort of had to respond. He, in his op-ed, goes into pretty nuanced detail I think about what he needed from Trump, basically, as someone who was really powerful and as someone who was a little bit beholden to him as someone who literally wants to access Hollywood.

He, I think, gave a good accounting of the power dynamics at play, not only for the immediate victims of harassment, but for people in the orbit of harassment, and how the effects of that can go far beyond the victims in the moment.

Matt Peterson: When you're watching things like this come about, when you hear of a new revelation, do you have a gut feeling of whether people will be able to survive it? I've heard that the reputation of Billy Bush, that he's trying to rehabilitate himself, that he's trying to set himself up for a new phase in career after being damaged by this first association with the Trump tape.

I guess I'm wondering, can people like Billy Bush come back from it? I know Harvey Weinstein's probably never going to work in the same way again. But what about other sort of mid-tier people on the scale here? Is this thing so big that it's going to consume their careers for the rest of time?

Megan Garber: Huh. That's a great question. I think it will really be sort of a case by case basis that we'll make those decisions. I say "we" because I think there is kind of a mass culture dynamic that's happening with these decisions. It's people within a workplace. But a workplace that's very much informed by I think the temperature of media coverage, and social media, and just a sense of what the public will and will not tolerate at this point.

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I do worry a little bit about backlash, basically, to all of this. There's a narrative that's been arising for the past couple weeks that's sort of the witch hunt element of all of this, and people are going too crazy with this, and everyone's a criminal, and all these sort of ideas. I think it's actually a valid concern. We want to be very careful about there's law, and then there's what the culture will tolerate, and those are very different things. I think we need to be very careful about assuming guilt preemptively.

But, I think these cases have borne out. The media, I think, have really acquitted themselves well in not publishing anything that isn't ready to be published. The Washington Post I think it was just last week, Project Veritas, James O'Keefe's attempt to catch the liberal media being liberal, that attempt failed. Because the Washington Post was doing really good journalism.

I think ... Sorry, it's a very roundabout answer, but I do think it will be sort of a case by case basis, but I also think we'll need to be really careful about not letting the elements of backlash get in the way of justice, because that's ultimately what this is about is justice, and making the world better for everyone in it.

Matt Peterson:

Yeah. On that theme of justice. I had an interesting question from a listener name Rachael, who brought up reference to South Africa. She's talking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission there, which is to say, there's other ways of achieving justice other than just sending people to jail and punishing them, right?

She wrote that, "Reconciliation might be better than painting all men with a broad brush for everything from straying hands during a photo op to rape. There's a big difference between one and the other."

She wants to know if you think we're headed in that direction of any kind of reconciliation instead of just punishment.

Megan Garber:

Yeah. Gosh, that's so interesting. I think that's sort of what we're seeing right now. I don't really see any official version of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, anything like that, but I do think that what is happening in the media right now is very much a form of that in sort of a more organic way. That we are, with each of these cases, and the way that each of these cases is reacted to in the media and among the public, we are deciding what we will tolerate and what we won't.

That's going to set the norms going forward. The word "normalization" was such a big one in 2016, but I think it's actually very much still relevant in 2017, not just in politics but also when it comes to harassment and how we think about what it appropriate in the work place. It feels awkward, and sometimes painful to have those discussions, because we haven't done a good job I think of

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hashing it out for ourselves, but I think that's where we are now, and that's why this work feels really important.

I think, again, it's in the media and it's also in the public. I think as painful as it can be to go through, just like any process of reconciliation will be, it's really important work.

Matt Peterson: Yeah. I've got a question about that pain. This is from Erin, who asks, "If you worry about the trauma among men and women who aren't victims but are sort of shocked by the reputed discovery and rediscovery of rape culture, do you think this is making it hard for people to process the news?"

Megan Garber: It very much could, because so much of it is so visceral. Especially when you read the accounts of the women. One of the things, going back to the apologies, one of the things that's been especially disappointing to me about many of the apologies is they're so kind of tense, and terse, and glib, and again, sort of vetted. You can just see the PR person doing the edits in those apologies, and then you read the testimonies of the women or the other victims, and they're so personal and so aching.

These are events that are with people for their lives, and affect careers, and affect just the world. It's, I think, very hard to balance the emotional tenor of everything with the broader cultural and political and economic issues as play. Because both are part of the story. Back to the original question, it's sort of the structures and the systems, and these very almost academic ideas butting heads against the most intimate elements of our lives.

I try to be really cautious of that when I'm writing about this. I hope I do an okay job, but I hope that all members of the media, and I think we have for the most part, but are very cognizant of that, because these are live wire issues for everyone in some way, and especially for people who have been victims before.

Matt Peterson: Yeah. Do you see any changes in the culture around being a bystander to these kinds of incidents? This is a question from Sanford, who wants to know about people who've known for years that individuals have been abusing women without stepping in. That's been part of, for instance, the reporting around these bigger cases, Matt Lauer, and then Harvey Weinstein, is that people suddenly felt free to talk about the things that they saw going on in the workplace. These open secrets that they knew about.

Have you seen a change in how people who are not victims but have seen these things unfold act in public?

Megan Garber: I don't know if could say I've seen it personally, just in my own life, but again, we're so new in this. This has only been basically two months in the making, so I think we do have to give ourselves a little bit of time to allow those changes to set in. What I would say, though, is just as a matter of media narrative, like you

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said, all these people who are coming forward and saying, "I knew it was wrong, but I just let it go, because what could I have done?"

I think there's a sense now, even going back to the social media idea, of each person is empowered. Each person can tell their story. Each person can share their experience and that can be amplified in any number of ways. I think that is a huge change.

I would actually point everyone to a really wonderful piece that my colleague Michelle Cottle did. She was an employee at The New Republic, and looking at the behavior of Leon Wieseltier, who was for a long time the literary editor there. Her piece just is I think a remarkable work of putting that idea of the open secret in a really human and relatable context. She explores how everyone kind of knew, but not everyone kind of knew. That kind of middle space of knowing and not knowing, and of secret and not secret, and how that can come about.

I think stories like that, that do that kind of, again, painful reckoning, are really useful because they sort of allow people to have a framework for all this stuff. Because we don't have a lot of language when it comes to talking about complicity, and turning the other cheek, and that kind of thing. Especially when it comes to harassment, I think we just sort of know vaguely that it's wrong, but you're not quite sure what to do if you see it, and all that kind of stuff. I think now we're at least having a sense of it's not just okay to speak up, but it's incumbent on us to speak up. And we'll go from there.

Matt Peterson: What has this been like to be a journalist during a time when so many of the people who have been exposed as abusive are significant journalists or media figures? You mentioned Leon Wieseltier, who we should say had some loose affiliation with The Atlantic, right?

Megan Garber: Yeah.

Matt Peterson: Obviously Matt Lauer, others, are at the top of our profession. How do you feel when you watch this kind of stuff happening to our industry?

Megan Garber: Yeah. You feel, very, in a way, complicit. Which is strange, because I really have not witnessed anything like that for myself. But it is our industry. It's right to use "our," because I think especially among journalists, there's a sense of, "We're in this together."

Even if we're at competing news organizations, we are all part of the same group and are motivated by similar things. To see, like you said, so many of the highest stars falling down around us, it's striking. You do feel like it is affecting you directly.

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I have to say, one of the best metaphors that I have heard for all of this, and this isn't necessarily about just journalism, but the sense of all the people who make the media, and make the world seem what it seems to be, the fact that all of them are possibly complicit in this ... Dana Stevens at Slate described that as, finding out that your kitchen has termites.

It's literally like the ground beneath your feet could be infected, and could fall out from under you at any moment. It's such a perfectly gross metaphor, I think, to think about this. Because there is something just awful about it, and disgusting, again, in the most intimate of ways, and yet it's also structural.

I would also say, just to add to that, one of the best pieces that I've read, not at The Atlantic, but at New York Magazine, is Rebecca Traister's piece on the idea that so many of the predators, people who are now being revealed to be predators, have shaped the media. The narratives that we use to understand the world. They have shaped that very intimately.

Mark Halperin, for example, wrote Game Change, who wrote Game Change about Hillary Clinton. Here was someone who has been revealed to have done what he did, determining the narrative of Hillary Clinton in her attempt to become president. Things like that. There are so many examples of that, where it's just these powerful men in powerful positions whose view of the world is trickling down, basically, into the way everyday Americans see the world. I think there's something very pernicious about that, but something very powerful about recognizing that that is what's happening.

Matt Peterson: You brought up this question about Hillary Clinton, which our members have asked about, too, and I've certainly seen plenty of people speculating about the fact that Mark Halperin and folks like Matt Lauer, who of course moderated a debate, was criticized at the time, and certainly in hindsight.

Have you gone back and thought about that campaign again? Do you share in this view that there was some sort of lurking sexism that we weren't really fully conscious of at the time, given the way that prominent media figures like those guys have become wrapped up in this scandal? Does it change your view?

Megan Garber: Very much. I'm not even sure if it's changed my view, because I actually, before I was a culture reporter, one of my first jobs in journalism was as a media critic focusing on politics coverage. One of my first jobs actually in journalism was covering the coverage of the 2008 campaign. One of the just completely common threads with 2008 was just overt sexism against Hillary Clinton. It wasn't even ... I feel like in 2016 it was a little bit more subtle and insidious, but in 2008 it was very in your face.

I went to some of the rallies that she would hold in New Hampshire, for example, and there were people holding up signs that said, "Iron my shirt."

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The media made a really big deal about the fact that one time at a diner she misted up for a second, and all of the American media was talking about Hillary's emotional moment, and she cried, and her veneer was cracked, and all this kind of stuff. I think that storyline has been happening with her for so long. But I very much, it's certainly determined by a media that is still largely run by men. So they're all very intimately connected. I don't see, necessarily, anything that different from 2016 versus more generally.

Matt Peterson: How do you relate this to the bigger moment that media and journalism are going through? The "fake news" moment, if you want to call it that. I think it feels from our perspective as journalists that this is a sea change, and it's certainly going to change the way that we report and write about men in power, or sexual harassment cases, or anything related to that.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that we are going to go out there and change the world, right? Not that we necessarily think of our jobs that way. Newsrooms are changing, but the media is not necessarily reaching as deeply into the culture in some places as it was. What do you make of this? Are we overestimating our ability to make change?

Megan Garber: One of the things that's so striking to me about this particular story is just it does feel like a really productive synergy between journalism and the public at large. If you look at, for example, just the Me Too movement. I should say the most recent Me Too movement, because it's been around before. But the most recent incarnation. That's the public. That's people having their voice, and using Twitter, and using Facebook, and using the platforms available to them to share their stories and their testimonies.

Then, the media is taking that in and analyzing it, and presenting stories accordingly. I think there is a really nice relationship there between the public and the media that I really appreciate. Beyond that, it's such a hard question, because I think it's something that is with us all the time. We don't necessarily want to specifically change the world, but we want to have impact. How do we do that in the most meaningful way possible?

But for this particular story, it does feel like something productive is happening.

Matt Peterson: Let me ask you another cultural question here from a member named Julia. Let me read her comment. She says, "It seems that our society is very torn about sex. On one hand, casual sex has become normal and widespread in the culture. It's lost stigma. On the other hand, unwanted sexual contact is somehow more significantly reprehensible than other non-sexual behavior in the workplace."

She says she doesn't condone any kind of sexual harassment, but she doesn't see necessarily how this is worse than any other kind of toxic work environment. Are we making too much out of one aspect of the culture here?

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- Megan Garber: That's really interesting. I guess I would say that the core problem with harassment is it's not just about sex, it's about power. So you see again and again these generally men in positions of relative power exercising that power over people in positions of relatively less power. This is why that affront is so great, because it sort of exploits people, again, at their most intimate.
- To me, that's why it feels especially grave. I think it's such a good observation that we are really bad about talking about sex in this society. You can go back to our Puritanical roots or what have you, but we're not good at talking about it. Then you couple that with the sort of behind closed doors idea of harassment and all of that.
- But I don't think we're making too big of a deal out of it, and I think it's good that we are treating it as a big affront, because it is. Because again, it's not just about bodies, and it's not just about sexual desire. But it is about power, and the exploitation of power.
- Matt Peterson: Rhonda, on our live chat, asks, is this, essentially, the tip of the iceberg? Are we, by making a big deal out of every violation here, opening up the door to future discussion of cases that might be lurking below the surface?
- Megan Garber: Yes. I think so. I think, yeah. There are sort of two things that could happen with the fact that so many of these stories are coming forward. Because I do think that there could be a backlash, and that we in the media could be seen as going too far, and all of that. But at the same time, there is a sort of power allowing for power effect, in the sense of there are so many stories being told that makes other victims feel more comfortable coming forward with their own stories. They're part of a movement rather than just out there on their own.
- The frictions of coming forward are a little bit lessened. So, I actually do think this will be a much broader thing. It's really important to remember, we are only two months into the so-called "Weinstein effect." And two months, in the grand scheme of things, is no time at all. I'll be really interested to see what this story holds in the coming year and the years to come.
- Matt Peterson: Well, we had a question from Barbara about how we write about this. She asks if the media could help change this kind of behavior by consciously including more women's voices in our stories. Does our coverage, does the way that we treat women in our coverage, help the gender power dynamics?
- Megan Garber: I think it does. It's hard, because so many women for so many reasons don't want to come forward, still. Despite all the progress that's been made, again, just in the past two months. But there are just so many cultural disincentives against coming forward. There are things we saw with Anita Hill, and there are things we saw with Hillary Clinton in a slightly different context. Women are punished for having opinions. For speaking out against injustices that have happened to them, and to other people.

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We still live in a world that is sort of knee-jerk misogynist in a lot of ways, and I think in a lot of ways that we're not even fully conscious of. It can be really hard to include women's voices, just in more traditional media, because so many women say, "I will tell you my story, but I don't want to go on the record. I don't want my name associated."

Very understandably. But again, and not to harp on social media too much, but I really do think that that's such a revolutionary platform for this, because when you look at Me Too, that's women adding their voices to a chorus. People can say to one woman, "I don't believe you. I don't believe you. Please stop talking."

All the kind of things that women are often told. But you can't shut up a whole movement. You can't say to all these women who have come forward, "You're wrong. You remembered it wrong."

All that kind of stuff. I think telling women's stories is really paramount. But I think also, I love the idea of women telling their own stories in their own voices, and not even necessarily being mediated through traditional media. And of course, I want to help to do that as a member of that media, but I also think it's really wonderful that women can do that for themselves in the way that they see fit, and via the platforms that they want.

Matt Peterson: At the same time, the backlash that you're worried about, social media is going to enable that, right? Certainly we see the cycle on lots of other sectors of politics and the culture. It's going to be a double-edged sword here.

Megan Garber: Maybe. Yeah, maybe. I think that's actually, and of course, I have a vested interest in saying this, but I also think it's true. This is where the traditional media really can play such an important role. Going back to the Washington Post, and the reporting that they've been doing, and the fact that they evaded Project Veritas' attempt to out them falling for a false story. They did their work. They did their journalism. They vetted the woman who came forward to them with her story of Roy Moore, and realized it was not a true story.

I think the more that traditional media can do that work of vetting, and can put things in context, I think that that will help against potential backlash, because you build an infrastructure of good, true, non-fake news narratives that can buttress itself against any false allegations.

But I think that also means that the media needs to be especially careful in its work. It always should be, but especially in this case, because one instance of an allegation that doesn't prove to be true could, at this very tense moment, prove pretty disastrous.

Matt Peterson: Aside from that sort of standard of care, do you care about backlash as a journalist? It's your job to report accurately on the stories that are happening,

Transcript of Masthead conference call with Megan Garber, Dec. 4, 2017

right? Does it matter to you that you see this potential for some kind of reaction as you go out and write every day?

Megan Garber: That's interesting. I feel like ... yeah. I'm sort of torn in this instance, because I feel like progress in this story is just good for people in general, and so I want to make sure that the progress keeps happening. But I also want to be mindful of, it's an objective, journalistic story. I think it's nice to be at The Atlantic in that sense, because I think so much of the value that we can add do this story is, like I mentioned before, putting things in context.

We're not necessarily doing a lot of the vetting ourselves, but we're explaining why the bigger picture matters, and how it works, and how it moves. I think there's that broader structural element.

Matt Peterson: Right. Well, Megan, I think we can leave it there. Thank you very much for your time, and everybody on the call, thank you for all of your questions. We will come back next week when I'm sure this story will continue to unfold. Alright, thank you, Megan.

Megan Garber: Thank you.

Matt Peterson: Alright. Goodbye, everybody.