

#MeToo

THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER REPORT

WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER



womensmediacenter.com



PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S VOICES

THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER WORKS TO MAKE WOMEN VISIBLE AND POWERFUL IN THE MEDIA

Founded in 2005 by Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem, the WMC is an inclusive and feminist organization that works to ensure women's realities are covered and women's voices are heard.

WMC works to make women visible and powerful in the media. We do so by promoting women as decision makers and as subjects in media; training women to be media ready and media savvy; researching and exposing sexism and racism in media; and creating original online and on-air journalism.

Our media programs that address the problems of unequal representation and misrepresentation of women in media include interconnected strategies that:

- Recruit and place diverse women experts in the media — print, broadcast, radio, Internet, social media, and media leadership through WMC SheSource.
- Train diverse women experts to be effective in media, and increase their thought leadership through WMC Progressive Women's Voices and other customized training and leadership programs.
- Investigate, report, create, and publish original media to expand diverse women's voices and representation through *WMC Features*, *WMC Women Under Siege*, *WMC FBomb*, *WMC Speech Project*, and our syndicated radio program and podcast, *WMC Live with Robin Morgan*.
- Research, document, and produce reports that highlight the status of women in U.S. media, equip activists with evidence, and create benchmarks to hold media accountable for sexist and racist coverage.
- Advocate before government officials and agencies on policies affecting women's access to media and technology, ownership of media and technology, and safe and free speech in media and technology.

#MeToo

THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER REPORT

By Eliza Ennis and Lauren Wolfe



Copyright 2018 Women's Media Center. No part of this publication can be reproduced without permission in writing from the Women's Media Center.



Photo: Mike Coppola/Getty Images

Ashley Judd (center), chair of WMC Speech Project, with *New York Times* journalists Megan Twohey (left) and Jodi Kantor (right), at the 2017 Women's Media Awards, where Judd received the WMC Speaking Truth to Power Award from Gloria Steinem.

Media and #MeToo: How a movement affected press coverage of sexual assault

On Sept. 27, 2018, a Palo Alto University professor named Dr. Christine Blasey Ford sat in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee and, under oath, told senators—and the world—that Brett Kavanaugh, nominee for the Supreme Court, sexually assaulted her 36 years ago. Republicans in Congress have expressed disbelief, wondering why Dr. Ford would possibly wait so long to come forward—with some calling her accusations a political ploy, if not an outright conspiracy. That many members of Congress, and even the president, expressed doubt over Dr. Ford's story before hearing her tell it is a stark reminder of why women who have survived sexual assault still struggle to be heard and believed in modern-day America, and how little has changed since Anita Hill sat in a similar chair 27 years ago.

Dr. Ford's testimony was historic for a host of reasons, but it happened to take place just as the country is about to mark a full year of the #MeToo movement radically changing the conversation around sexual assault—in politics, in the media, and hopefully also at home, in workplaces, and elsewhere.

October 5 marks one year to the day since *The New York Times* published an article detailing decades of accusations of sexual assault lodged against movie producer Harvey Weinstein and the damaging tactics he used to silence his accusers. In the days and weeks following the story's publication, media coverage of Weinstein's abusive behavior exploded, as did overall coverage of sexual harassment, "inappropriate behavior," and rape.

"The world has permanently changed," said actor and Weinstein accuser Ashley Judd. "We are in a new era. It is messy, imperfect, and urgent."

The women who spoke to *Times* reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey included Judd and a woman named Emily Nestor, who had worked for Weinstein for only a single day. Another assistant, Lauren O'Connor, wrote a 15-page memo describing sexual misconduct by Weinstein toward many women, including another female assistant who felt forced to give Weinstein a massage while he was naked.

These women magnified a movement started years earlier by organizer and survivor Tarana Burke. It was Burke who, in 2006, first began to express both sympathy for and solidarity with women who had themselves suffered sexual assault or harassment with the words "me too." "On one side, it's a bold declarative statement that 'I'm not ashamed' and 'I'm not alone,'" Burke told CNN in 2017. "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,' or 'I get it.'"

The Weinstein revelations opened the floodgates, with other powerful men long suspected of abuse facing similar public reckonings. Online, thousands of women shared their own stories of sexual abuse and assault.

"This has been a year when the media and truth itself are under siege," said Julie Burton, president of the Women's Media Center. "The #MeToo movement has revealed previously hidden patterns of sexual harassment, wage discrimination, and hiring policies that excluded and intimidated women. By exposing horrible individual and institutional practices, we see an opportunity for a new transparency and permanent changes aimed at greater equality and power for women. We at the Women's Media Center focus on media coverage because of its profound impact in telling

society who has power and what matters. The #MeToo movement has shined a much-needed light on survivors and the stories that need to be told.”

As Burke told CNN in 2017, #MeToo sprang from “the deepest, darkest place in my soul.” The darkness surrounding the deeply upsetting subject of sexual assault began to pervade our media too, with *The New York Times* alone publishing 155 articles in October 2017 mentioning Weinstein’s name in the context of sexual assault accusations. As allegations against other powerful men in Hollywood grew increasingly common following the initial Weinstein story, the media began to cover sexual assault in earnest. Stories of sexual assault and harassment, many of them hidden for years, came out of institutions across the fabric of society, particularly in the ones examined in this report: church, Hollywood (and related areas of entertainment), media, and politics. We also took a close look at coverage not only of Weinstein but also of President Donald Trump, who, even before he was elected, admitted on tape that he has sexually assaulted women.

“In the past, what happened to men was political, but what happened to women was cultural,” said Women’s Media Center co-founder Gloria Steinem. “The first was public and could be changed, and the second was private, off limits, even sacred. By making clear that sexualized violence is political and public, it breaches that wall. It admits that sexualized violence can be changed.”

In this report, we take a close look at the press coverage that followed the Weinstein revelations and the rise of #MeToo, using data to analyze whose stories were covered, which outlets considered sexual assault and harassment important enough to report on, and whether or not the media industry—and American culture on the whole—has changed as a result of the movement. Looking at five months of news coverage before the eruption of #MeToo and the 10 months that followed it, we were able to draw various conclusions about how the movement affected coverage. By breaking down how coverage in the various arenas of American life waxed and waned, we were able to clarify which institutions took precedence over others. By looking at the gender of bylines on sexual assault/#MeToo articles, we found a surprising shift in who is writing stories on sexual assault and harassment. Examining the words most used in headlines for stories on each institution we focused on (and, separately, for Trump and Weinstein) gave us an idea of how media framed these stories.

This research looked at some of the leading newspapers in the United States: *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday* (N.Y.), *Tampa Bay Times*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Columbus Dispatch*, *The Denver Post*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *The Mercury News* (Calif.), *The New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. We chose these papers for their broad geographic distribution and high circulation.

#MeToo's Effect on Media Coverage

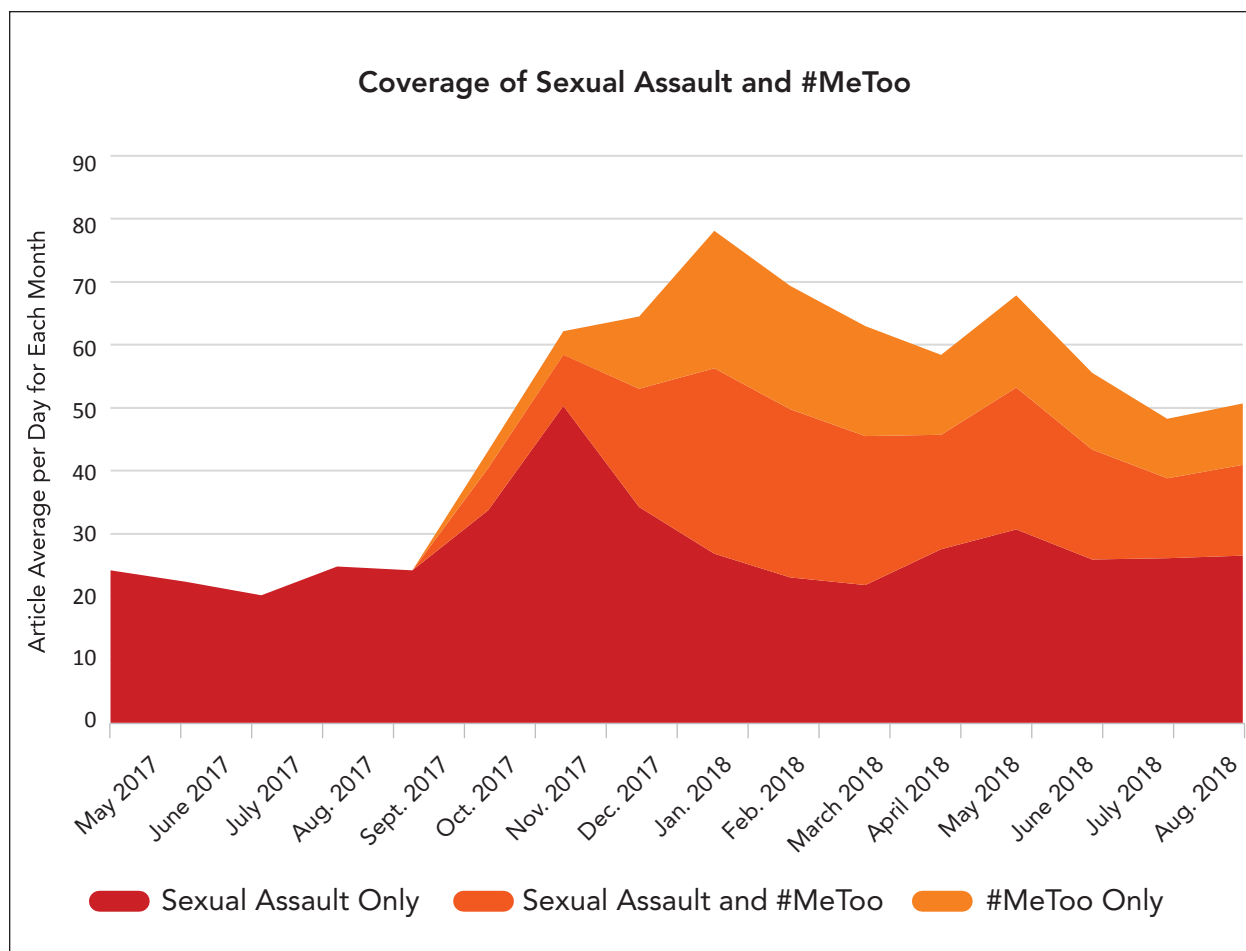
Rape culture creates an environment in which sexualized violence “is treated as the norm and victims are blamed for their own assaults,” journalist Amanda Taub wrote in a 2014 Vox article. Over the past number of years, as the term “rape culture” has spread, it has prompted an important conversation—at least in private discussions and occasionally in media—that is making visible a structure that has long been so pervasive that it has gone unquestioned and thereby unseen. The idea is that beyond the act of violence itself, there exists an array of “cultural norms and institutions that protect rapists, promote impunity, shame survivors, and demand that women make unreasonable sacrifices to avoid sexual assault,” Taub wrote. For women, the miasma will remain until the country decides it is time to tear down these institutionalized behaviors. One step toward doing this is making clear the extent of the problem, as #MeToo has been doing.

Rape culture directly harms women and girls in two ways: It allows a tacit endorsement of environments that increase incidents of sexual assault, and it burdens all women with cultural expectations about their own behavior (as in the cliché, but real, “casting couch” phenomenon: “She wanted a job, so she spread her legs”). Rape culture treats sexual assault and harassment as “a problem to be solved through improving the behavior of potential rape victims” instead of “improving the behavior of potential rapists,” Taub explained. To make this shift, it is essential that society convey that sexualized violence is not only unacceptable behavior, it is a crime. And to do that, a movement needs to be seen and heard.

The power of #MeToo—which appears to have made some inroads toward societal change—can be clearly seen in the pages of U.S. newspapers. Our 15-month study shows that the rise in coverage of cases of sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, or accusations of all of the above went up overall (except in the category of “church,” a term we are using to encompass not only the Catholic Church but also other branches of Christianity that have been dealing with abuse by clergy and other leaders). The continuation and amplification of that trend can be largely attributed to the #MeToo movement. #MeToo went viral in October 2017; by the end date of our study, August 2018, 35 percent of coverage of sexual assault and harassment mentioned the phrase “me too” or the hashtag #MeToo.

The existence of the hashtag has led people to talk more about sexual assault and harassment both online and in daily life, which has helped drive forward media coverage (and vice versa). It has also led to an increase in discussion of other women’s rights issues, such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and the wage gap.

Our study found that between 80 and 700 articles a month focused on the #MeToo movement itself, rather than mentioning it in the context of a story about a specific sexual assault case. In February 2018 alone, over 55 percent of stories about sexual assault mentioned the movement, and for four months in 2018, this proportion remained over 50 percent.



In the chart above, the bottom section represents the number of articles about sexual assault that did not also discuss the #MeToo movement—the baseline for what coverage would look like without the existence of the movement. The section above that shows the number of stories about sexual assault that also discuss #MeToo. The topmost section is coverage that talks about #MeToo in a broader context, outside of coverage focused solely on sexual assault and harassment. Following the rise in coverage of sexual assault that stemmed from the brave declarations of women against Weinstein last fall, the #MeToo movement itself has driven the overall continuation and amplification of that trend.

Trump Is 'Winning'

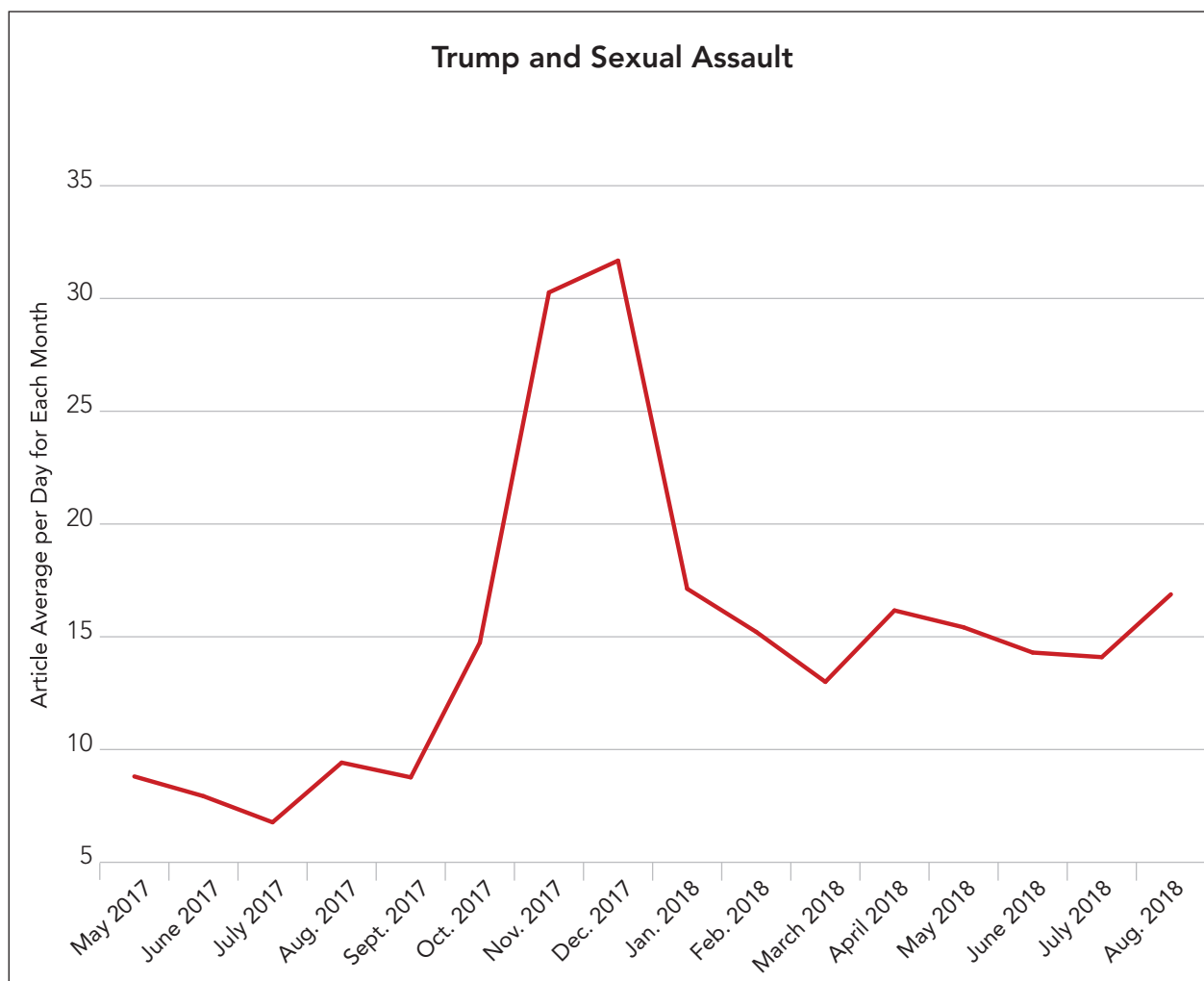
Muscle seems to be what politics requires these days. Trump's aggressive statements as recorded by *Access Hollywood* and the vile sentiments expressed in Kavanaugh's yearbook entry exemplify the broad acceptance of "locker room talk." These men forcefully fight back against their accusers—it's so much easier to do that than to admit to themselves that (gasp) they may have done something heinous and likely criminal. And the denier-in-chief is, unfortunately, our president, powerfully symbolizing the abuse #MeToo is fighting.

Our study shows that over the course of 15 months, Trump's name was more frequently tied to sexual assault than any other person or category.

- The name “Trump” appeared in 1,020 headlines for stories about sexual assault or the #MeToo movement between October 2017 and August 2018—an average of 92 stories a month.
- “Weinstein,” the second-most common name in our analysis of headlines for stories about sexual assault and harassment, appeared 424 times in that same time period—an average of 39 articles per month.
- Articles that talked about Trump and sexual assault but *not* #MeToo averaged 16 per day between October 2017 and August 2018, with a peak of more than 30 per day in November and December 2017.
- Those mentioning Weinstein’s name averaged 12 a day in the same time period (October 2017 to August 2018).

Trump’s name appears regularly in stories across all subject areas, from sports to breaking news. Yet, while his name is present in 7 percent of headlines across all sections and topic areas (that are unrelated to sexual assault), the rate jumps to 9 percent for articles that mention both Trump and sexual assault. Trump’s name appears more frequently than any other name in articles—both in the headlines and the stories themselves—about sexual assault, and his name is more often tied to sexual assault in headlines than in stories about the president in any other subject area.

The appearance of Trump’s name in headlines for stories about sexual assault spiked in December 2017, when three women who in 2016 had accused Trump of sexual assault and misconduct



spoke out once again—this time asking that Congress carry out a bipartisan investigation into the allegations.

At any given time over the 15 months examined in our study, Trump's name appeared in 23 to 43 percent of articles about sexual assault. The headlines that mentioned Trump most often also included the words "sexual" (200 times) and "Moore" (180 times)—referring to Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, who was accused of sexual misconduct by a number of women. The high prevalence of Trump's name in these articles demonstrates his role as a symbol of the fight against #MeToo. While #MeToo represents a movement to end sexual abuse and rape culture, Trump is its antithesis. Although some stories accuse Trump of sexual misconduct, assault, and/or harassment, the majority are instead stories in which his name appears with Moore's and other accused men because he is speaking out in their support.

There were 96 instances of Trump's name appearing alongside the word "allegations," 93 of "Trump" with the word "harassment," 82 adjacent to "sex," and 75 times his name appeared alongside "assault" in the period between May 2017 and August 2018.

Very few of Trump's accusers have spoken to the media, with Stormy Daniels (whose real name is Stephanie Clifford) being the exception—but even so, the average number of articles mentioning her per day between January 2018 and August 2018 was extremely low (.25 average articles a day in January and .75 average in August). There was a spike in her print coverage, however, in March, when Daniels spoke to CBS's *60 Minutes*, demonstrating that media can amplify a survivor's voice in the face of constant coverage of the alleged perpetrator.

#MeToo Across Society

Media

The media has long been known as a white boys' club, a tough industry for all women, including and especially women of color. To cite one particularly egregious example, women did not receive bylines at *Newsweek* until they sued the magazine in 1970. And, nearly 50 years later, there is still an abysmal imbalance in who is telling the stories. Our report "Divided 2017: The Media Gender Gap" found that women were bylined or given credit for only 38 percent of stories across print, broadcast, and wire services, and the American Society of News Editors found that just 8 percent of newsroom employees were women of color.

Beyond assignments, it's not unusual to feel that men are crossing the line from the professional to the (unwanted) personal for those of us who've long worked in newsrooms, that sexism is the norm. Nearly two-thirds of women journalists told the International Women's Media Foundation in 2013 that they'd experienced some form of sexual harassment, intimidation, or sexualized or physical violence while on the job.

In the past year, a reckoning has finally begun. We've seen an outpouring of accusations against men at every level, including the very top, of media organizations. The number of powerful men dethroned—including CBS and PBS's Charlie Rose, NBC's Matt Lauer, CBS's Les Moonves, and NPR's Michael Oreskes, among many others—publicly betrays a previously silent, pervasive climate of sexual intimidation and assault within the press.

"The axiom that media prefers to report on itself more than anything else does not hold true in this case."

Still, surprisingly, among the categories we examined, media had the fewest number of stories overall (1,076) when it came to sexual assault and harassment in its own newsrooms. (The church came in at 2,250 stories, politics at 2,624, and Hollywood at 4,198 from May 2017 through August 2018.) The axiom that media prefers to report on itself more than anything else does not hold true in this case.

Why? It is likely due to the fact that men are still helming most outlets and telling most of the stories. The media, clearly, is still grappling with how to change its deeply rooted culture of sexism.

Politics

Sex “scandals,” from extramarital affairs to the circulation of sexual photographs, are not uncommon in the political world. Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Bill Clinton, and Newt Gingrich—all of these men (and so many more) were accused of inappropriate conduct and faced consequences to various extents, depending on their political position and respective time period.

The more articles written about such things, the greater the political impact (in one form or another). In our study, we looked at the coverage of politics as related to sexual assault. “Trump” was not included as a search term, so we looked at articles focused on accusations against other politicians and candidates.

Compared with other topics, politics had the lowest average number of articles about sexual assault in all but two months of the study period—an average of 0.7 stories per day in May 2017, and 2.4 per day in August 2018. However, there was a massive peak in November and December 2017, with an average of 27 articles per day, when allegations against Roy Moore broke on Nov. 9, 2017. This pushed up the average number of political articles from October 2017 through May 2018 to 9 per day, above the averages for the church and media, even though politics had less coverage than all other subject areas in most months.

Hollywood

Movies and TV have helped shape some ideas about sexual assault that are plainly false. A woman is thrown on a bed, fighting back angrily, but the audience is supposed to think she likes it. Rape is often portrayed as sexy. Following a woman around for weeks and playing a boombox outside her window at night to win her over? So romantic. Or, wait, so stalkery.

So was it really any surprise that sexual abuse has long been rampant in Hollywood?

After the Oct. 5, 2017, *Times* story, news outlets published article after article describing the pervasive atmosphere of sexual harassment and lewd behavior toward women throughout the entertainment industry. Coverage of sexual assault and “unwanted conduct” was tied to Hollywood more often than in any other industry, with an average of 14 articles per day from October 2017 through August 2018. Hollywood coverage peaked in October 2017, with 588 articles (19 per day), and November 2017, with 681 articles (23 per day). As in other categories, coverage slowed after an initial surge, but still remained high, with an average of about twice as many articles published each day between May and August 2018 (an average of 8 per day), when compared with the same time period in 2017.

Church

Having been smoked out in 2002 by the *Boston Globe*’s Spotlight team, abuse by clergy—and efforts by the Catholic Church to cover it up—were for a time at the heart of conversations about sexual assault. More than a decade later, we’re still talking about it, but at a low, steady level.

Coverage of all Christian church-related abuse stayed relatively constant throughout our study's time period, making it one of the issues less influenced by #MeToo. (Although, anecdotally, the movement has actually had an effect on religious communities—but it's possible that these stories have just not been widely covered in mainstream newspapers.)

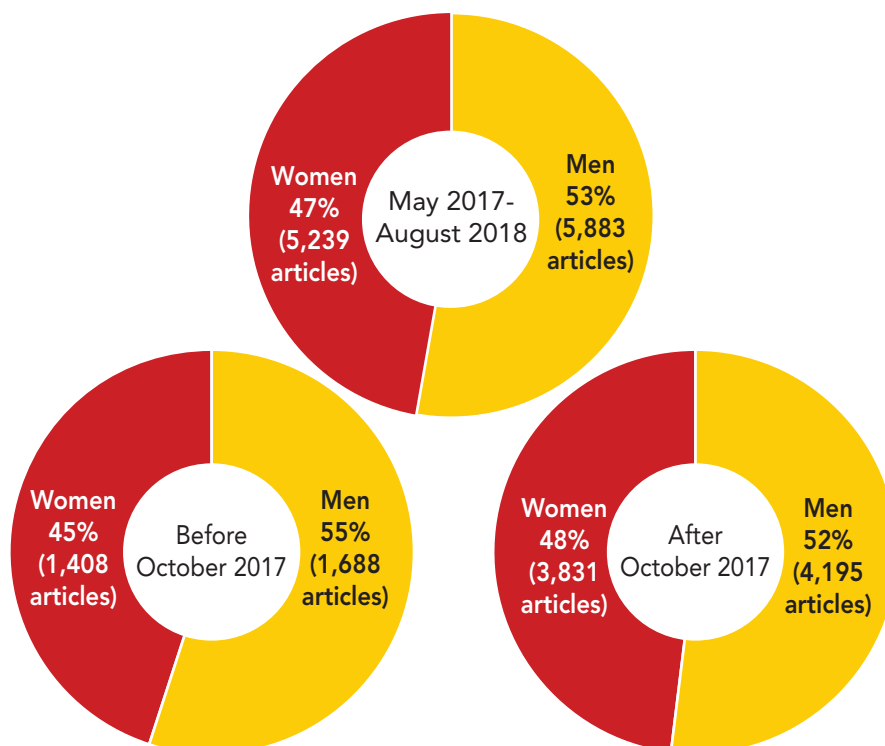
Although there was a spike in coverage in November and December 2017 (which had more than double the average number of articles, 10 per day, compared with other months), this spike did not produce a lasting effect like it did for other categories of coverage, with averages throughout 2018 matching those of mid-2017. Between October 2017 and August 2018, coverage averaged 7 articles per day, which is higher than articles about the media, but lower than the time period average for politics and Hollywood. There was, however, an uptick in August 2018, reflecting the publication of a Pennsylvania grand jury report that revealed that 1,000 children had been sexually assaulted by clergy in the Catholic Church.

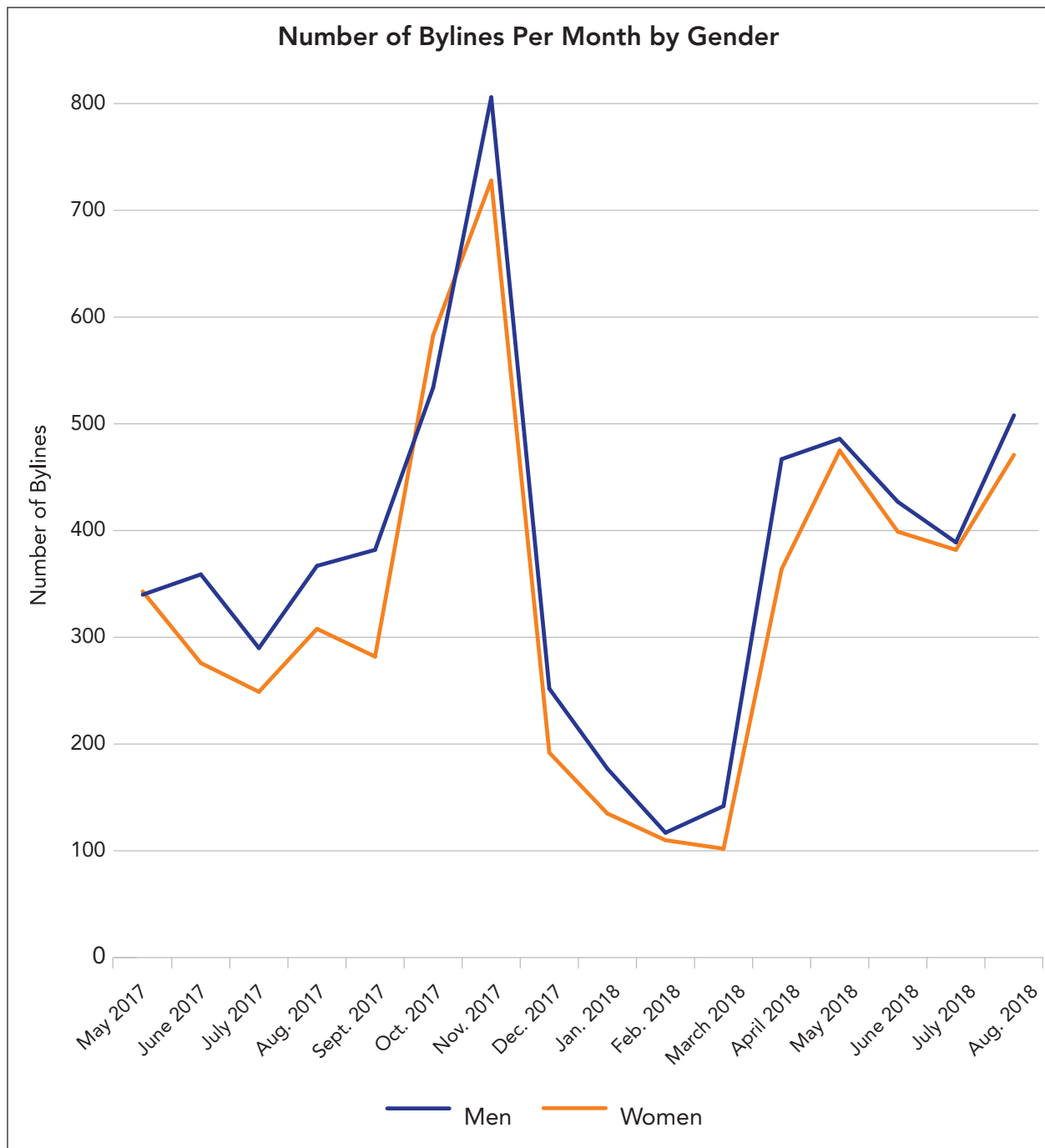
Overall, the average number of articles about the church never rose as much as in the other categories, always hovering around 7 per day.

Byline Analysis

Before the #MeToo movement gained momentum, women's bylines were featured on just 45 percent of total articles about sexual assault between May 2017 and October 2017 while men's names appeared on 55 percent. In comparison, after October, women's bylines were on 48 percent of stories about sexual assault. This small uptick in women writing about the issue suggests that either women reporters are pushing harder to cover these issues or editors are assigning more of

Overall Article Breakdown By Byline





them to women. Either way, this is a movement driven by women, and it's a fair bet to think that women journalists may be the ones most loudly advocating for more coverage.

In comparison to these percentages, women tend to have closer to 40 percent (or less) of bylines for stories on all topics across top U.S. newspapers, according to our 2017 report "Divided 2017: The Media Gender Gap." When it comes to stories about sexual assault, on average women had 47 percent of bylines across the entire time frame of our study, while men had a majority of bylines at 53 percent.

We also showed in “Writing Rape” that the writer’s gender affected how stories were told: Women journalists interviewed alleged victims more often than male journalists, and a higher proportion of women journalists wrote about the impact of the alleged attack on alleged victims. Forty percent of women journalists covered this aspect of stories, versus 33 percent of male journalists. A higher proportion of male journalists used quotes about the behavior of or impact on the alleged perpetrator than did female journalists—35 percent versus 32 percent.

Words Used in Headlines

[illegible]

10

and the “alleged perpetrator” is not called an attacker. We did find, however, that outlets often downplay the severity of a proven attack.

The New York Times launched its historic Oct. 5, 2017, article with a strong headline, based on what was known at the time: “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.” However, two of these words, “harassment” and “accuser,” have continued to be at the forefront of the Weinstein coverage—even after he was formally charged with rape and sexual assault. Women have long had to deal with the press minimizing their experiences in this arena. And even now, in the #MeToo era, this is still the case.

In our 2015 “Writing Rape” report, we also studied the headline language used to describe sexual assault. Despite many experts and activists agreeing that “survivor” is the preferred term in cases of sexual assault (unless the person died—then it’s “victim”), headlines published in the past calendar year used the word “victim” 277 times, compared with only 44 times for “survivor.” “Perpetrator” was used just twice. In addition, most articles kept the article in the realm of hearsay, appropriately for the most part, with 946 articles referring to cases with words like “accusations” or “allegations,” 16 percent of which referred to the survivor as the “accuser.”

“It was also likely that survivors suddenly felt more confident in coming forward—and perhaps particularly to women journalists—as the country opened up a conversation about sexual assault.”

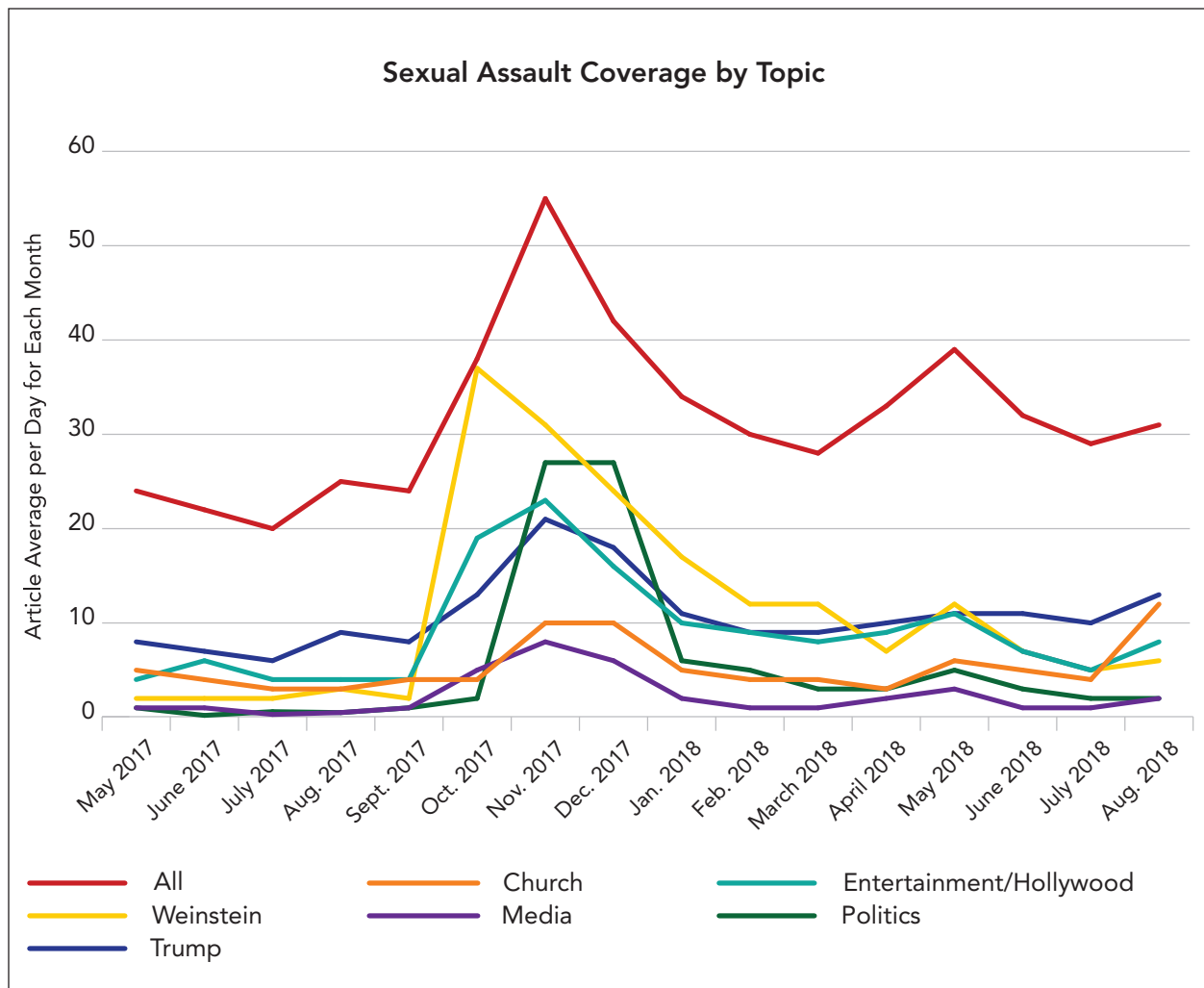
Coverage of Sexual Assault Has Increased

Media is one of the most powerful economic and cultural forces in the world, and yet very little research is currently available that documents media coverage of sexualized violence. This study’s findings on how media is doing in this arena—and where it needs improvement—can propel change within newsrooms and therefore in the wider world. Rape culture can be dismantled only if it is shown to be as pervasive as it actually is—and the media can play an important role in showing that.

For advocates who fight rape culture and work on behalf of women who have been sexually assaulted, we have a particular conclusion from our study that is a hopeful one: Coverage of sexual assault and harassment remains higher today than before #MeToo in almost every category we examined (Hollywood, media, and politics). Media coverage peaked from October 2017 to January 2018 (November had the highest number of stories, at 54 per day) but still remained about 30 percent higher at the end of our study than before October 2017. In May 2017, there was an average of 24 headlines per day about sexual assault, harassment, rape, groping, etc. At the end of our study, that number had risen to 31 per day.

As of August, all categories remained up overall from the beginning of our study, clearly showing that the media is paying more attention. But one caveat: While there is a measurable, lingering positive effect of the movement, media attention has been shown to truly peak only when big names are involved, indicating that the press is getting better at covering famous figures involved in sexual assault but may be continuing to ignore the many, many other cases that involve “ordinary” people.

This is an area in which media can do better. Much better.



There is now a legal defense fund (led by Fatima Goss Graves of the National Women’s Law Center) from Time’s Up, a movement that stemmed from a November 2017 letter by the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (the National Farmworker Women’s Alliance). The letter, which stated it was written on behalf of 700,000 women farmworkers, expressed solidarity with the Hollywood women who had exposed Weinstein’s crimes, but it also gave an accounting of sexual assault and harassment these women have suffered. The fund will “help defray legal and public relations costs” for those women who have been assaulted or harassed in the workplace. Women from around the country have contacted the fund and received help. However, these are not the women whose stories you’re going to read about in the newspaper.

If #MeToo has taught us anything, it is that survivors’ stories need to be heard in order to get justice or for personal healing—and to change the culture that has normalized sexual abuse, sexualized violence, and harassment. We know that despite women of color experiencing higher rates of sexualized violence than their white counterparts, their stories are often missing from the coverage. Jane Fonda acknowledged this fact in a recent interview with MSNBC’s Chris Hayes about the public reaction to allegations of sexual harassment and assault from multiple women against movie producer Harvey Weinstein. “It feels like something has shifted. It’s too bad that

it's probably because so many of the women that were assaulted by Harvey Weinstein are famous and white and everybody knows them. This has been going on a long time to black women and other women of color and it doesn't get out quite the same." Since most survivors aren't walking up to reporters to tell their stories, it is incumbent upon journalists to look for these women and carefully work with them to decide whether or not they want to come forward. They need to know that their identity will be protected if their life is at risk, and they need to know why it is important that they tell the world what happened to them. A single story from a survivor—a survivor who is treated with respect and protected as necessary—can show other women that it is safe to speak out too.

Sexual abuse and assault should be a beat in itself. It is much more complex than the way it has been portrayed for decades—it is not only a very personal issue; it is also one that affects society as a whole. It is about power and who holds it, and about how women and minorities are disenfranchised in this country—as shown when they face barriers as they attempt to navigate the medical and legal systems post-attack. Women have repeatedly reported not being taken seriously. They've been told how much they screwed up by taking a shower after they'd been raped, blamed over and over for drinking alcohol, etc.—all of this delineating the line of privilege clearly: Men probably didn't do anything that bad, and even if they did, some of it was the survivor's fault.

In the struggle for equality, there has to be recognition of what women are still up against in order to fix it. If women are frightened in their workplaces because of male harassment, they cannot succeed in a way that a man can in that same office. If police, state and federal laws, and the court system continue to downplay the seriousness of what is perpetrated upon women, survivors cannot find justice. And if the media does not continue to push these stories to the foreground, then a whole population of people in pain are being tacitly told that nobody thinks what they've been through is important enough to be addressed in the public realm.

Outlets should consider creating a dedicated place for this coverage. If the upward trend we've seen in our study is to continue, then we, as journalists, must take action.

Executive Summary

Over the past year, survivors have felt emboldened to share their stories of sexual assault and harassment. This flood of news coverage, beginning with the *New York Times* story in October 2017 uncovering Weinstein's history of harassment, has been amplified and continued by the #MeToo movement. The Women's Media Center examined the coverage of sexual assault and the #MeToo movement between May 2017 and August 2018, the findings of which are summarized in this report.

This report focused on what was covered and how much it was covered:

- In October, as the movement was getting underway, coverage of sexual assault and harassment in Hollywood and politics skyrocketed.
- Though coverage of sexual assault reached a peak in November 2017 and declined thereafter, newspapers continued to report on these issues at a higher rate than before October 2017.
- Coverage of media-related sexual assault cases was the lowest of the categories we studied over the entire study period, though politics was higher only because it experienced high spikes in coverage in November and December of 2017.
- Another key finding of our report was that President Trump's name appeared more in articles about sexual assault and harassment than any other person.
- As coverage increased, women journalists began to write more of the stories. Though bylines remained dominated by men throughout the majority of the year, the increase in coverage by women (particularly in October 2017, when women had 52 percent of bylines) is a step forward.

Yet, even as women journalists' voices become more prevalent and survivors increasingly speak up, media outlets often lag behind when it comes to amplifying the #MeToo movement. Moving forward, the Women's Media Center challenges news outlets and journalists to:

- Use precise and empowering language—use “survivor” rather than “victim” and distinguish words like “harassment” from “assault” based on clinical definitions and formal charges, rather than selecting one arbitrarily.
- Create a specific journalist beat or section area for sexual assault and harassment of women, and train journalists on how to cover and investigate these kinds of stories sensitively.
- Think carefully about which cases your media outlet is choosing to cover, and which it is ignoring. Why is it that Hollywood has been covered the most? How can the media give a broader voice to those who do not yet have it?
- Understand the impact that media coverage makes on societal perceptions of issues like sexual assault and wield this power with thought and care.
- Build inclusive newsrooms.

“Without inclusive newsrooms, women's stories, and especially the stories of women of color and other underrepresented groups, are missing from the conversation,” said Erica Gonzalez, WMC board member. “This report highlights how cultural shift begins to be possible when women are given the opportunity to share their stories.”

Ultimately, media coverage of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment shapes how our culture views these issues. This coverage and framing affects how we treat people on all sides of the issue. The way survivors' stories are told in the media, by whom, and how can skew national sentiment. Look

to coverage of the confirmation hearings of Brett Kavanaugh and remember that media itself can investigate allegations of sexualized violence beyond what is merely said. The fourth estate has not just a duty to report the news, but also an obligation to treat sources, stories, and ideas ethically—and particularly so in journalism that is about something as intimate, traumatizing, and ever-present as sexualized violence.

Methodology

The Women’s Media Center analyzed the content of headlines, bylines, and articles on 15,228 pieces of news produced from May 1, 2017, through Aug. 31, 2018. The survey consisted of 14 of the nation’s most widely circulated newspapers. They are: *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday* (N.Y.), *Tampa Bay Times*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Columbus Dispatch*, *The Denver Post*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *The Mercury News* (Calif.), *The New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*.

WMC RESOURCES FOR THE MEDIA

The Women's Media Center is dedicated to diversity in all our programs and projects, including [WMC Progressive Women's Voices](#) media training and leadership programs; [WMC SheSource](#), an online database providing topical experts to bookers, producers, and journalists; and [WMC News and Features](#), [WMC Women Under Siege](#), [WMC Speech Project](#), [WMC FBomb](#), [WMC Reports](#), and [WMC Live with Robin Morgan](#) — programs whose writers, broadcasters, producers, and on-air guests hail from diverse backgrounds. Our goal is to be inclusive and to feature voices and experiences that model the kind of representation that accurately reflects the world we live in.

[WMC SheSource](#) is an online database of media-experienced women experts whom we connect to journalists, bookers, and producers looking for sources. WMC SheSource makes it easier for journalists to include diverse women's voices across all topics in their news coverage.

WMC Research and Reports

WMC's "The Status of Women in the U.S. Media" report is the industry standard on statistics for women in media and is produced and published on a regular basis. The report is more than statistics — it is evidence, a tool, and creates benchmarks to highlight the status of women in media, especially at the intersection of race and gender. The report also provides information that campaigns can organize around for change.

[WMC Media Watch](#) — Women and Politics

[WMC Media Watch](#) — Rape and Rape Culture

[WMC Media Watch](#) — Reproductive Issues

[WMC Media Watch](#) — The Gender Gap in Non-Acting Oscar Nominations

[WMC Media Watch](#) — The Gender Gap in Non-Acting Emmy Nominations

[WMC News and Features](#) are timely stories and commentaries that provide a missing feminist perspective on news events, reports on underreported topics of relevance to women, and stories that analyze the media's treatment of women.

[WMC Women Under Siege](#) shows how sexualized violence is being used to devastate women and tear apart communities around the world, conflict by conflict, from Syria to the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is the only journalism project of its kind dedicated to this subject in a complex way. It keeps these stories in the headlines for the public and for policymakers.

[WMC FBomb](#) has pioneered the intersectional teen feminist identity and provides socially conscious youth with the personal and professional tool of a media platform. It serves as a welcoming community to feminist-minded young adults and as an accessible entry to a broader social justice dialogue.

[WMC Speech Project](#) spotlights and documents online abuse and its effects on women's rights, civic participation, and free speech. The project uses WMC's journalism and activism platforms to raise public awareness of the scope and effects of toxic online abuse.

[Women's Media Center Live with Robin Morgan](#) is a nationally syndicated, hour-long weekly radio show and podcast with an additional international audience online at iTunes in 110 countries.

WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER

Here is a list of key research, reports, publications and content channels:

Women's Media Center Status of Women in U.S. Media (2017, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012)

WMC Divided: The Media Gender Gap (2017, 2015, 2014, 2012)

Women's Media Center Status of Women of Color in the U.S. News Media (2018)

WMC Media Watch: Women & Elections — Where Voters Saw the Most Sexist Treatment of Women Candidates in Media (2016)

WMC Media Watch: Women & Elections — #WhoTalks — U.S. Presidential Election Tracking of Cable/TV News Show Analysts by Gender and Race (2016) (Partnership project with the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics and GenderAvenger)

WMC Investigation: Analysis of Gender & Non-Acting Oscar Nominations (2018, 2017, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2010)

WMC Investigation: 10-Year Review of Gender & Oscar Nominations in Non-Acting Categories (2016)

WMC Investigation: Analysis of Gender & Primetime Non-Acting Emmy Nominations (2018, 2017, 2016, 2014, 2013, 2012)

WMC Investigation: 10-Year Review of Gender & Emmy Nominations in Non-Acting Categories (2015)

WMC Media Watch: The Gender Gap in Coverage of Reproductive Issues (2016)

WMC Media Watch: Writing Rape — How U.S. Media Cover Campus Rape and Sexual Assault (2015)

The Women's Media Center Guide to Covering Reproductive Issues

Name It Change It: The Women's Media Center Guide to Gender Neutral Coverage of Candidates

10 Do's and Don'ts on How to Interview Sexualized Violence Survivors (2017)

Name It Change It: An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates' Appearance

Name It Change It — WMC Infographic — Stick Figures Explain Negative Impact of Appearance Coverage on Women Candidates (2013)

Bias, Punditry, and the Press — Where Do We Go From Here? (2008) (Report from the Women's Media Center, the White House Project, and the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education)

Unspinning the Spin: The Women's Media Center Guide to Fair and Accurate Language (2014)

WMC Women Under Siege Syria Crowdfunder

WMC Women Under Siege Reports: Sexualized Violence in Conflict Zones

WMC Speech Project Wheel of Online Abuse & Harassment

WMC News and Features

WMC FBomb

WMC Speech Project

WMC Live with Robin Morgan



WMC BOARD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Women's Media Center staff is thankful to our co-founders, Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem.

We extend special thanks to the NoVo Foundation, Pinpoint Foundation, Jane Fonda, Barbra Streisand Foundation, Libra Foundation, Ruth Turner Fund, Fund for Constitutional Government, The Starry Night Fund, and InMaat Foundation for their generous support of the Women's Media Center.

WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER BOARD MEMBERS

Jane Fonda, Co-Founder
Robin Morgan, Co-Founder
Gloria Steinem, Co-Founder
Julie Burton, President
Maya L. Harris, Co-Chair
Pat Mitchell, Co-Chair
Helen Zia, Co-Chair Emerita
Janet Dewart Bell, Vice Chair
Rebecca Adamson
Soraya Chemaly
Anita L. DeFrantz
Lauren Embrey
Judy Gold
Erica Gonzalez
Regina K. Scully

This report's authors

Eliza Ennis is the media analyst and data manager at the Women's Media Center, responsible for designing and conducting research projects for WMC. She is currently an A.B. candidate in Social Studies at Harvard University focusing on international development, inequality, and public health. Eliza is also the president of the Harvard International Relations Council.

Lauren Wolfe is an award-winning journalist and photographer who has written for publications from *The Atlantic* to *The New York Times*. She is the director of WMC Women Under Siege, a journalism project at the Women's Media Center on sexualized violence and conflict. Wolfe is also a columnist at *Foreign Policy* magazine.

Project Coordinator	Kate McCarthy
Research	Eliza Ennis
Design	Pamelyn Burke
Art Director	Diahann Hill
Editor	Willy Blackmore
Social media	Frances Nguyen
Social media design	Tiffany Nguyen
Communications	Cristal Williams Chancellor
President	Julie Burton

Photo: Timothy Greenfield Sanders



“All movements toward systemic change begin with brave victims of the current system—the oppressed, violated and left out—speaking truth to power. Sadly, every woman I know has a #MeToo story, and we need to hear them and believe them—we need media to investigate and report on the realities and stories of everyday women, and especially women of color, who are more marginalized. The impact of media coverage of stories of abuse of power and sexual predatory behavior can lead to institutional and cultural change. The Women’s Media Center will not rest until that change becomes a priority in newsrooms across the country and a reality for women in all walks of life.”

—Pat Mitchell, board co-chair, Women’s Media Center

WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER



womensmediacenter.com

 [@womensmediacntr](https://twitter.com/womensmediacntr)