Breaking Open the Sexual Harassment Scandal

Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey Exposed an Ugly Hollywood Secret. They Are Receiving the Press Club’s Inaugural Impact Award

IT WAS the entertainment industry’s story of the year, by far. Harvey Weinstein, the producer known for Oscar winners such as *The English Patient* and *Shakespeare in Love*, was a serial sexual abuser. For decades he had preyed upon young women looking to break into show business. His actions confirmed the worst fears of the Hollywood casting couch.

Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey got the story first. Now the *New York Times* investigative reporters are the winners of the Los Angeles Press Club’s inaugural Impact Award for journalists whose work makes a profound difference in the world.

“These two intrepid women faced down Harvey Weinstein by exposing the sordid truth of the mogul’s decades-long sexual misconduct and abuse,” Press Club Executive Director Diana Ljunguaeus said in announcing the award. “They did so in spite of the onslaught of threats from Weinstein and his powerful allies. Hollywood will confront itself and become a little bit healthier thanks to their work.”

In the wake of Kantor and Twohey’s Oct. 5 story on Weinstein’s history of harassment, some 80 women have come forward with tales of abuse by the 65-year-old industry legend. Weinstein was suspended from the independent studio that bears his name. Then, after the *New Yorker* published an equally horrifying account of women who claimed they had been raped by Weinstein, he was fired from his own company. He has since been booted out of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Producer’s Guild. He has also been stripped of awards, including a prize the Los Angeles Press Club gave him for his documentary about Kaffel Browder, a teen imprisoned without trial whose story prompted changes in the New York judicial system.

Weinstein has apologized, checked in to rehab, and maintains that any sex he had with the accusers was consensual. Police departments in London, New York and Los Angeles have opened investigations into his alleged misdeeds.

“You never know what’ll happen when you launch your story into the world,” Kantor said in an October interview with *Marie Claire* magazine. In the wake of the Weinstein story, other prominent men have been outed as abusers, including Amazon.com’s entertainment chief Roy Price, political commentator Mark Halperin, actor Kevin Spacey and even former President George H.W. Bush. All have publicly apologized and many have lost their jobs. Meanwhile, thousands of people around the world have turned to social media to proclaim #MeToo and share their own stories of harassment.

For Kantor and Twohey, the key to breaking the story lay in getting prominent women to talk
about what happened, on the record. Their first article included gripping stories from actress Ashley Judd as well as details from an internal Weinstein Company memo, where one-time employee Lauren O’Connor detailed a “toxic environment for women at this company.”

Kantor and Twohey have devoted their careers to shedding light on abusive treatment of women and children. Their articles have prompted national and international discussions, new laws, and changes at some of the world’s top corporations. Along the way, they have worked closely with a wide array of sources on delicate issues, finding sensitive but powerful ways to bring the truth to light.

After Kantor reported on bruising working conditions at Amazon (including women who were not given time to recover from miscarriages and a stillbirth), the company introduced its first paternity leave policy and revised other practices. Her article about Starbucks’ punishing scheduling system—which left workers struggling to meet childcare and doctor’s appointments—prompted the company to shift policies and helped kick off a fair scheduling movement that has resulted in new laws in several cities and states. Her investigation into Harvard Business School’s treatment of women resulted in the dean issuing a blanket apology to all alumnae.

At Reuters, Twohey’s five-part series exposing an underground network where parents gave away adopted children led to new laws, an FBI investigation, and felony convictions for two of the main subjects. That work was a finalist for a 2014 Pulitzer Prize. At the Chicago Tribune, her articles about untested rape kits, mishandled DNA evidence and doctors who preyed on female patients led to criminal convictions, new state laws and other reforms.

During the 2016 presidential race, Twohey uncovered disturbing revelations about Donald Trump’s treatment of women for the New York Times. When Trump threatened to sue, David McCraw, a Times’ attorney wrote a firm response.

Kantor, now 42, was among the youngest people to edit a major part of the New York Times when she ran the Arts and Leisure section. She wrote The Obamas, a 2012 book about the first family’s adjustment to life in the presidency. Kantor has said she was inspired to tackle stories that stick up for those in need in part because of her Jewish upbringing, and the specter of Hitler’s unchecked rise to power. She’s married to Ron Lieber, a financial columnist for the Times. They live in Brooklyn.

Twohey, meanwhile, grew up in a journalism family. Her father was an editor at the Chicago Tribune; her mother a TV news producer. She joined the Times last year after having worked at papers such as the Moscow Times and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

As mothers of young girls, both Kantor and Twohey have said they were inspired to take on the Weinstein story by the idea that they could make the world a better place for their children. They gained the confidence of the women who came forward in part with that idea as well.

To contact celebrities like Judd, they went around their publicists and reached out to them directly, letting them know that there were other women ready to speak out.

“When we got hold of Ashley, we told her, ‘Hey, we’re not just asking you to go out on a diving board alone,’” Kantor said in the Marie Claire interview. “We explained that we’d built a really strong investigative story and that we wanted her to, in a way, speak to this much larger thing.”

The effects continue to be felt.