



Book Business Women Say #MeToo

with
Rachel Deahl, Publishers Weekly
and
Brooke Warners, SheWrites.com

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KENNEALLY: Sexual harassment and assault in the workplace is no longer just the Harvey Weinstein story, nor is it any longer confined either to Hollywood or even the United States. In London, Prime Minister Theresa May has called this week for stronger measures to protect women working at Westminster, home to the British Parliament. In Paris, protestors gathered on Sunday at Place de la République to add their voices to the hashtag Me Too.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. According to recent reporting in *Publishers Weekly*, the book business offers women no safe harbor in spite of their preponderance in the workplace. Indeed, *PW*'s news director Rachel Deahl writes that executives, editors, and salespeople have endured everything from so-called bad behavior to assault. Rachel Deahl joins me now for a special look at the issue. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Rachel.

DEAHL: Thanks for having me, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're looking forward to speaking with you about this very important issue. An article appeared in *Publishers Weekly* recently, reporting that you did along with your colleagues John Maher and Jim Milliot. And I think for our listeners, Rachel, a good place to start is with perhaps a couple of surprising statistics, that women are the preponderance of the workplace when it comes to publishing, but there is nevertheless a power issue here because of who are the managers. Tell us about that.

DEAHL: Yeah, so the workplace in book publishing – and we focus on trade book publishing, I should say – is about 80% women, but the overwhelming majority of men are in executive roles. So there is this notable disparity in terms of the power structure, I'd say, along gender lines in the industry.



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KENNEALLY: So anyone who would think from the figure of 80% of the workplace this is necessarily a female-friendly environment, they'd be mistaken.

DEAHL: Yeah. I think one of the things to think about when talking about sexual harassment in the workforce – and I think we've seen this from some of the reporting that's come up – is it's pervasive across all industries. I think the questions are really about what are some of the particulars of different industries, because the story's the same. I think the particulars are what changes.

KENNEALLY: Right. Well, indeed, as you say, unfortunately, the stories are the same, and the kinds of stories that you collected for your *PW* reporting will seem familiar to anyone following the story that has really expanded and mushroomed since the allegations against the Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein came up a couple of weeks ago. Tell us about the range of incidents that were reported to you. It really does run the gamut.

DEAHL: It does. We heard about everything from people being made to feel uncomfortable by stares and offhand comments to physical assaults. And we also heard about things where – we had a story where a boss admitted via email to one of his female employees that he was in love with her. So it really did run the gamut.

KENNEALLY: And what was surprising to me in a couple of the incidents that you recounted, Rachel, is the way that HR handled it, or for that matter didn't handle it. Many of the women went to the human resources department to report the incidents, to try to get some help, and what happened?

DEAHL: In one instance that we reported on – and this was at a smaller independent publisher – I think for a lot of women, this is sort of – or I think anybody reporting this kind of harassment, this is sort of the nightmare scenario. They went to their HR department. The HR department heard from various women who were involved. They took those stories, and then without telling the women, they then passed them along to the executives at the company – I think the person who the charges were leveled against. And then women were spoken to by someone at the company, but nothing actually came of it, and the only people who wound up leaving that company – I think by choice – were the women who had filed the complaint.

KENNEALLY: Right. And as depressing – I was going to say distressing, but I suppose depressing, as well – as these stories are, is the sense that this is something which has not really changed very much over time. You spoke with people who have



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long standing experience in trade book publishing, others who are fairly new to the industry. And someone who was quoted by name in the piece, Laura Dawson, who occasionally contributes to *Publishers Weekly* – she had blogged about several incidents herself back in 2014, and when the issue returned to the front pages, she reposted that to Facebook. And it really is a personal account but very much a professional one of sexism in the book industry.

DEAHL: Yeah. And I think what you see in book publishing and you see in other industries is – and one of the problems of sexual harassment is it's such a difficult thing to weed out, because reporting on it for the victims, it really creates often very difficult scenario, I think, in that I think different things happen depending on where you're working. The scenario we just talked about happened at a small publisher, and I think the difficulty of really small companies – and this came up in the reporting of the Weinstein story – you don't have a formal HR structure often, and sometimes the company, as the Weinstein Company, they talked about, is sort of thought of as a one-person company.

And then the flipside of that is if you're at a really large corporation, other difficulties arise. I think there's often a fear if what you say might be used against you, and it might not result in a scenario of the person you're leveling the charges against, anything ultimately happening to them. So it's a really difficult thing, I think, for people to deal with. And I think it's difficult for companies to deal with, frankly.

KENNEALLY: Absolutely. Difficult and painful, indeed, for the individuals. Brooke Warner is an experienced editor, writing coach, and publisher at She Writes Press, and she joins me on the line from Berkeley, California. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Brooke.

WARNER: Thanks, Chris. Happy to be here.

KENNEALLY: Well, we appreciate your joining us to talk about the issue. You've heard what Rachel was just saying, and I guess I want to start by asking you about your sense of publishing and the potential for change. Has anything changed very much as you listen to what Rachel's just been telling us about from her reporting, but also what you've seen yourself?

WARNER: I just think this question of sexual harassment is so insidious, and it's a tough one to put your finger on, because women just have to deal with this in every corner of our lives, and it is something that we endure, so to speak. I think anyone who has the experience of being a woman in a workplace has experienced this in



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some capacity, and when I posted on Facebook myself, people were saying it's not just work. It's school. It's the stables. It's soccer practice. And it starts really young.

So I don't think anything has changed. I think the good news is that women are in positions of more power, and sometimes women will speak out, as Rachel was discussing. Perhaps someone will go to HR. Perhaps someone will level a complaint. But largely, I think women just shy away from doing it because the consequences are really problematic. And I think the other thing is that when it's pretty – sometimes not so egregious – like I've just had so many experiences over the years of men telling me to smile or just to act more whatever they think is more feminine or more soft or more anything – that doesn't seem to them like sexual harassment. And you as a woman are put in that position – do you double down, or do you just laugh it off? And I think most of us are trained to just laugh it off and look the other way.

KENNEALLY: And it's also how society, the culture, has chosen to identify this kind of behavior. In the past, in publishing, but perhaps elsewhere, it might have been seen as somehow inoffensive. But perhaps that is where we stand today in 2017. Those kinds of perceptions no longer prevail, and certainly the reputation of publishing didn't help in that situation.

WARNER: Right, and I think that women have largely been conditioned to just be like, this is how it is, and if you want to play ball, you play the game, and you just accept it. All kinds of things. Like I said, lots of times, I think the men think their sort of innocuous comments, or just being flirtatious – and that women who would think anything otherwise, to my point, are being too sensitive.

And so I think what's happening now is this stuff is coming out about Harvey Weinstein and all over the place, and women are saying, yeah, of course. This has always been the case. But I think there was a lot more freewheeling maybe in earlier decades, where women just didn't say anything, or they did play ball. And that's the point that I made when I went on the record in *Publishers Weekly*. There was sort of a fast and loose culture in the '80s, and I have heard lots of male friends and colleagues that I know who lived through that time who thought it was pretty awesome because it was less politically correct and it was more fun.

KENNEALLY: One of the things about publishing that is challenging, I would imagine, for many women is the social aspect of it, and Rachel's reporting brought this out. Book publishing isn't just about what happens from 9:00 to 5:00 in the workplace.



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It's about book parties and book fairs and writers' conferences. Do those situations put women in potentially vulnerable situations?

WARNER: I think they absolutely can and do, yes. I think there's kind of two sides of it. One is the vulnerable situation where someone might actually be in the position of being propositioned or being coerced or feeling like she has to say yes. I personally have never been in those kinds of situations, but I have friends who have.

But on the other side of it is where you want to be involved and have a professional conversation, but the men at the table aren't letting you have a professional conversation. They want to turn it into something frivolous or jokey or flirty. And I've had that kind of conversation a lot with men where I'm the only woman at the table. I want to talk about something wonky like distribution, and the men are pushing me to a place of talking about good times and partying and fun, and, oh, we don't want to talk about that. Let's just talk about your smile. Let's talk about this. Let's talk about something that is not interesting to me.

It's a problem because that puts women in the position of either having to constantly try to change the conversation or deal with the fact that you're going to have a frivolous conversation when what you really want to do is have a serious conversation, and I think it actually has the impact of women not getting ahead in the same way that men might, because they're not really allowing you to have those kinds of serious conversations. And certainly, this isn't all the time, but over the course of my career, I have been in lots of those kinds of conversations, and it's frustrating.

KENNEALLY: And, Rachel Deahl, did that come out in your reporting, this social aspect of publishing and the risks that that may pose for women?

DEAHL: It did, and I think it's one of the particulars that the piece struck on. Look, every industry obviously has a strong social component to it, but I think publishing is unique because so much of it does happen after hours, whether you're talking about book fairs or you're just talking about reading. And a lot of it's happening with people who are involved in the industry in all sorts of ways – people who may work for a big corporate publisher or people who may be freelancers and unaffiliated with any kind of structure behind them.

And so we heard from one woman who talked about a situation where she was lured against her better judgment back to this publisher's hotel room at a – I think it was at a book fair – and then he attacked her once she was there. In recounting it,



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she said how silly she felt after for going there, and one of the things that came up, I think, that Brooke touched on is that I think that some women don't have their guard up in those situations. I think if you go out totally unaffiliated from work, you might be at a bar or something – I think you're more prepared for the kinds of things that might happen to you. But there was a sense of feeling – what this woman talked about – that she was around her colleagues, so she wasn't really thinking about a social interaction. She believed when this person said I want to show you some books that they really wanted to show her some books, not that it was a line to lure her back to his room.

And I think that's one of the difficulties that happen when you're out socializing with colleagues, is that you think it's still a continuation of work. You think you're around your equals. You think it's about work, and they're really making it about something else, catching some women off guard in a way that they might not be caught off guard in a regular social situation.

KENNEALLY: Rachel Deahl, news director of *Publishers Weekly*, thanks for joining us and for speaking with us today about your article, "The Women of Publishing Say #MeToo."

DEAHL: Thanks for having me.

KENNEALLY: And Brooke Warner, who is a publisher at She Writes Press in Berkeley, California, and an editor and writing coach, thank you for joining us, as well.

WARNER: Thanks so much, Chris.

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Beyond the Book co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Join us again soon on Beyond the Book.

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