

Demonstrating and Inspiring Courage:

How Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey Took on an Institution and Inspired a Movement

Mary Carol Butterfield
Advanced Studies in Journalism
2017 McGill Program

When Jodi Kantor accepted the McGill Medal for Journalistic Courage, she was quick to clarify that she and her fellow honoree Megan Twohey were different from the other journalists Grady College has awarded it to in the past. They had not faced bullets, they had not gone into warzones, and they had not confronted murderers. They took on a powerful man and an institution that had enabled decades of harassment. As Kantor explained, their biggest fear was of failure, and they certainly did not fail. In many ways, they succeeded beyond what they ever could have imagined. Not only did Kantor and Twohey expose Harvey Weinstein's decades of harassment, but their stories, along with those of the *New Yorker*, helped to start the #MeToo movement that shaped 2017 and gained momentum into this year while empowering women across the country to speak up about harassment they faced, demanding action against the accused. The enormous success of their story and the movement they helped to launch would never have been possible without their courage, a courage that Kantor said is accessible for any journalist.

Long before Kantor and Twohey published their investigation on Harvey Weinstein, *The New York Times* made a commitment to reporting on sexual harassment as a team. Emily Streel and Mike Schmidt broke the story on Bill O'Reilly and the tactics he used to silence accusations of harassment, and Katie Benner reported on the harassment female entrepreneurs faced from venture capitalists in Silicon Valley (Lang 2017). Their success and the techniques they employed to get to the truth gave Kantor and Twohey a strong foundation to build on. However, from the very beginning, Kantor and Twohey knew the story they were undertaking would not be an easy one to write:

We had almost no information, Megan was still on maternity leave, Harvey Weinstein had a public reputation as a humanitarian, even getting the actress' phone numbers

seemed like it would take a whole investigative process unto itself. Hollywood sources were telling us we would never get the story and that even if we did nothing would change. (UGAGradyCollege)

Even once they had their sources, Kantor and Twohey still faced roadblocks getting these sources to share their stories. First, many of the women had signed nondisclosure agreements, or NDAs, that did not allow them to talk about their time working for or interactions with Weinstein. Kantor explained that they would “regularly make the case that NDAs are meant to protect proprietary company information. They are mostly threats and means of intimidation” (Lang 2017). Because NDAs are not uncommon, Kantor and Twohey frequently have to have conversations with sources about the rarity of getting sued over one, but it nevertheless proved to be a challenge. However, the bigger obstacle to getting sources to talk was helping them overcome their fear that speaking out would hurt their careers. Weinstein, like many others in the industry, served as a gatekeeper. The influence he had in Hollywood, even once people left Weinstein Co. or Miramax, was intimidating. Earning their sources’ trust required spending 30 minutes working together to craft the perfect text or talking to sources for hours about movies they had seen or books they were reading, anything to get them to feel safe opening up. In an unusual twist, the accusers in this story were more famous to the average American than the accused (Lang 2017). The impact that celebrities like Ashley Judd and Gwyneth Paltrow had by going on the record and sharing their stories was enormous. Once Kantor and Twohey had their sources, they were able to focus on actually putting together their story.

Writing their first story required a village of reporters, editors, and legal advisors. Kantor and Twohey had to focus their report, deciding on the overarching themes and what information was most essential. As they began writing, both journalists felt an enormous responsibility to

their sources. Though they did not want to become their advocates, they wanted to tell their stories and tell them well. As mentioned previously, their biggest fear was that of failure, but that is not to say their courage was not needed elsewhere. Weinstein attempted to intimidate the Kantor and Twohey and threaten the paper. What started with hearing from lawyers or PR people grew to a large team coming at the *Times* as Weinstein attempted to use overwhelming force to suppress the story. Though Kantor and Twohey cannot go into the specifics, Twohey did say they were shocked when Charles Harder joined Weinstein's legal team. Harder is famous for suing *Gawker*, ultimately putting the notorious publication out of business (Lang 2017). Ultimately, Weinstein's actions stemmed from desperation, knowing his legacy was on the line. Kantor and Twohey persevered, publishing their first story on October 5, 2017.

The Hollywood insiders who told Kantor and Twohey that their reporting would not change anything could not have been more wrong. The same day the article was published Weinstein issued an apology and said he would be taking a leave of absence from the company (BBC 2017). Five days later, the *New Yorker* had published an article including allegations from 13 more women. Rose McGowan, Cara Delevingne, Mira Sorvino, Asia Argento, and Lena Headey joined the ranks of those accusing Weinstein of rape, harassment, and misconduct. By October 17, Weinstein resigned from his company's board. That same day Roy Price, the head of Amazon Studios, also resigned in the face of sexual harassment allegations (BBC 2017). Price was only one of many to face accusations as scrutiny on Hollywood increased. On October 28, the *New York Times* posted another story on Weinstein, with the *New Yorker* publishing another a week later. One month after the initial article was published, the impact of the story was clear and astonishing.

Kantor and Twohey's reporting inspired and empowered women to come forward and publicly share their stories. Social media embraced the momentum, and the #MeToo movement emerged. It spread across social media, individuals were able to share their stories and connect with others who had been in the same position. Hollywood fully embraced the campaign, supporting their own and victims across the country. In addition, what *USA Today* called the "Harvey Weinstein Effect" led to more than 150 individuals being accused of sexual misconduct from Hollywood to Washington. Matt Laurer, Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., and Charlie Rose all faced the consequences of their actions, their accusers emboldened by Kantor and Twohey's reporting. For Twohey, this demonstrates a remarkable cultural shift:

For the first time, I think, maybe ever, you have a culture in which women now feel comfortable stepping forward and making allegations, whereas in the past they felt like they would be the ones to suffer consequences to their careers and worse if they spoke out. (*CBS News*)

Over six months later, Kantor and Twohey are still humbled by the success of their story and determined to continue the reporting they started so many months ago.

The kind of courage Kantor and Twohey demonstrated is courage to persevere, courage to go the extra mile to find the truth, and courage to tell a story no matter how many people tell you it will not change a thing. It is the kind of courage that any journalist can demonstrate as they look for stories that need to be told, and it is the kind of courage that is as accessible to student journalists reporting for their campus news station as it is to the best investigative reporters at national publications. Kantor and Twohey's bravery and dedication gave a voice to those Weinstein had silenced and exposed misconduct that had been going on for decades. Their story, along with several others, sparked the #MeToo movement and the Harvey

Weinstein effect. Kantor and Twohey not only demonstrated courage but inspired courage. Their McGill Medal will have a place next to their Pulitzer Prize, Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting, Los Angeles Press Club's Impact Award, and many more to come, and their courage will continue to inspire journalists for generations to come.

Works Cited

“Harvey Weinstein timeline: How the scandal unfolded.” *BBC News*, BBC. 12 Feb. 2018.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41594672>

Lang, Brent. “How New York Times Reporters Broke Hollywood’s Biggest Sexual Harassment Story.” *Variety*, Variety Media, LLC. 13 Dec. 2017

<http://variety.com/2017/biz/features/new-york-times-harvey-weinstein-report-megan-twohey-jodi-kantor-1202637948/>

“McGill Media Award: Jodi Kantor.” UGAGradyCollege, YouTube. 12 April 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4AcOIdMjKU>

“NYT reporters on breaking Harvey Weinstein story, #MeToo ‘reckoning.’” *CBS This Morning*, CBS Interactive Inc. 19 Dec. 2017.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sexual-harassment-2017-jodi-kantor-megan-twohey-reporting-impact/>

“The Harvey Weinstein Effect.” *USA TODAY*, USA TODAY. 2018.

<https://www.usatoday.com/pages/interactives/life/the-harvey-weinstein-effect/>