

## Women have changed the mood. Now we need to change policy

By [Harriet Harman](#)

Only better policy and processes for equal pay, reporting abuse and harassment and ending male privilege will change women's reality

We're having an extended series of "moments" about gender with Harvey Weinstein's outing as a serial sexual assaulter, outrage at Donald Trump's celebration of groping women and the rise of #metoo and #timesup.

Social media allows women around the world to immediately see how their sisters are battling to make progress. The women's movement which, in decades gone by, flourished around kitchen tables and at school gates is now, courtesy of the internet, international.

An affront to women in the US engenders support in the UK, the [passionate misogyny speech of Julia Gillard](#) inspired solidarity and anger in the UK.

The sisterhood is now global. And there's no doubt that the mood has changed. Assaults on women which were commonplace but not acknowledged are now put in the public domain and challenged. But we have to learn the rights lessons from these moments.

The first is that we've made progress. In years past Weinstein would have been regarded as frisky, "a bit of a lad", the young women judged as "asking for it" or frigid. Now it is acknowledged as wrong and it is the men who have to account for their actions rather than the women they prey on.

Second, Weinstein is not "one bad apple". That sort of behaviour is prevalent in the film industry and indeed in all occupations with a male hierarchy and in which women want to advance. The vast majority of men would not dream of abusing their power to force themselves on young women. But some will and hitherto they've had impunity.

Third, the lesson is that there's safety in numbers. One woman on her own would just have been crushed by Weinstein's powerful legal and PR team and driven out of the industry. But no man can do that when there are a multitude of women's voices.

Fourth, we need to use the moment to challenge men acting in the same way. [Women](#), and men, have been doing that in respect of other men in the film industry. In the UK women stood up to challenge a cabinet minister, defence secretary Michael Fallon. Jayne Merrick, a young journalist, risked her reputation and her career to speak up about Fallon groping her. But others then came forward and he was sacked.

Fifth, we need to alter the complaints system so that a man who sexually assaults women is stopped after the first occasion not only after decades. That means the complainant must be able to report anonymously. No woman wants to be known only for the fact that she's complained against a famous man.

There must be independent adjudication of complaints. He can't be judged by people who know and work with him but don't know her. And there must be protection from backlash and discrimination against the victim. The complainant is doing a public service by challenging criminality. She must be protected – not vilified. In the UK, parliament is changing its rules for complaints against MPs, as is the [Labour](#) party.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/21/women-have-changed-the-mood-now-we-need-to-change-policy>

Six, we need to ensure that male-dominated hierarchies are a thing of the past. Sexual assault and exploitation cannot thrive in the same way where there is a mixed team of men and women in authority.

In more rumbling in the gender jungle, we've had an explosion of anger and embarrassment in the UK about unequal pay triggered by the BBC. We all love "Auntie", as our national broadcaster is known, but it is not at all loveable that the BBC pays its onscreen men massively more than its women.

Carrie Gracie, the brilliant Mandarin-speaking BBC Chinese editor, discovered that she was paid 50% less than the BBC's US editor. (And he doesn't have to speak Mandarin or risk arrest to do his job). **She protested and resigned** and BBC women and the wider women's movement rallied to her support.

But we need follow-through. In laying her career on the line she has more than "done her bit." It's now up to all of us to ensure that the discriminatory pay structures from the top to the bottom of the BBC are changed.

Unequal pay is not confined to the BBC but is endemic in other broadcasters and across other industries. Thanks to Labour's Equality Act employers (whether public or private) will for the first time, in April this year, have to publish annually the average pay for their women and the average pay for men. And the gender pay gap which so many people deny exists will be well and truly laid bare.

We then need our Equality and Human Rights Commission to collate and publish this information by sector and by region so all women, and men, can see how their organisation compares. And the EHRC will need to insist on tough action plans and strict targets. Unions will need to move pay equality up the bargaining agenda to do justice for their female members. We don't just want to see the gender pay gap, we want to change it.

Success in the battle to get a pay gap reporting into law was swiftly followed by heated argument about how it would be measured. I held out for average hourly pay for women compared to average hourly pay for men. That way we'll be able to see the discrimination against the army of female part-time workers. The National Office of Statistics has reported the pay gap as around 9% – a figure which I've never believed.

Early reports from organisations publishing ahead of the April deadline show it around 30% which I think will be nearer the mark. While in Australia, I'll be intrigued to hear more about how your public broadcaster, ABC, has managed to have no pay gap at all. Even if your most highly paid presenter is a woman, I'm amazed that overall, taking into account the pay of top managers down to cleaners, ABC says it has no pay gap. Similar declarations here have not borne scrutiny. I'm hoping my scepticism will be replaced by admiration.

We can celebrate that we've changed the mood. But we need to change the reality and that means change in policy and processes. Male privilege is deeply entrenched. These "gender moments" put that in the spotlight. But they mustn't be just movements. We must use them as the spur to change and that means relentless persistence and dogged determination. But with the support women can gain from each other around the world, we are up to the task.