

PREFACE

[Content note: this preface discusses sexual assault and consent violation.]

Shortly after I completed the manuscript for this book, the United States, for the second time in its history, knowingly put a man against whom there were credible allegations of sexual violence on its Supreme Court. The message is loud and clear: violating another human being, disregarding someone's non-consent, does not preclude a man—especially a white man—from holding one of the highest offices of the state. This is, of course, not shocking. After all, Donald Trump himself bragged about being a sexual predator, and that did not stop him from being elected president, either.

In light of such egregious abuses of power, it may be tempting to look at a book on sexual consent and wonder what good it does. It is not that powerful people, powerful men like Clarence Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh, and Donald Trump, do not understand that the women they are violating do not consent. Rather, they feel that their own desires and their power override any objections from women like Dr. Anita Hill, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, and the countless unknown women Donald Trump has grabbed “by the pussy.” What good can a book like this, one that takes sexual consent as its starting point, do in the face of that?

The answer is that this book is about much more than consent. It is, at its core, about power: about the blatant abuses of it by men like Thomas, Trump, and Kavanaugh; but also about its more insidious operations—through ideas and culture—that create the rape-supportive environment we are living in. It is a book about peeling back the layers of this rape culture and dismantling the power structures it is enmeshed in (patriarchy, racism, white supremacy, cishnormativity, compulsory (hetero)sexuality, ableism, capitalism) until individual consent actually matters.

The #MeToo movement is the most visible expression of this goal to date. Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation is a reminder of how far we have yet to go to achieve it. But it is also a reminder that it is a goal worth fighting for. And fight we will.