

STATE OF NEW YORK ::
DIVISION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ERIC F. COPPOLINO,

Complainant

- VS -

OMEGA INSTITUTE FOR HOLISTIC STUDIES, INC.,

Respondent

STATE OF NEW YORK, COUNTY OF ULSTER

ERIC F. COPPOLINO, duly swears [or affirms], deposes and states:

1. I am a sex and gender author and broadcaster published worldwide on a wide diversity of contemporary issues, in magazines, newspapers, radio, internet and an academic journal.
2. I am also a horoscope writer, who has published for the past 23 years in daily, weekly, monthly and annual formats in numerous countries around the world, both in print and on the internet. I consider the horoscope, as I write it, to be a branch of spiritual philosophy, mainly concerned with ethics and personal choices.
3. Beginning in January 2008, I served respondent OMEGA INSTITUTE as its monthly horoscope writer, as well as occasionally as a workshop presenter. In 2011 I also was invited to be the "Hermitage Resident," the highest honor that OMEGA INSTITUTE affords a member of its community.
4. At the time I was hired by the OMEGA INSTITUTE, I was told that this was based on the good work I had done during the prior decade for a community magazine called *Chronogram*, where I currently serve as a columnist and horoscope writer.
5. On Feb. 21, 2018, I met for lunch in Rhinebeck, N.Y. with Robert Backus, the executive director of OMEGA INSTITUTE, as well as with Angela Casey, the editor in chief, and Meg Downy, the chief marketing officer. In that informal meeting, we discussed my many experiences working with OMEGA INSTITUTE for the past decade, my writing career, and other subjects, and also considered my future with the organization.

6. In February 2018, *Chronogram* published my monthly column, called "Take a Step Back," commenting on the "MeToo" movement [EXHIBIT A]. In the article, I said, "I, like many, am concerned this movement is often claimed for women only, sometimes aggressively. The purpose of #MeToo is supposedly ending sexism. Do we think we're going to do that with more sexism? Many men and boys are routinely sexually abused, which we know among other places from the billions paid by the Roman Catholic Church in recent decades to settle lawsuits."

7. In my article, I also quoted author Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid's Tale*, et al), one of the best-known and most respected feminist authors of our day. In her own recently-published commentary on MeToo, Atwood wrote about times in history when

"the usual rules of evidence are bypassed." Many have pointed out that the men who have been taken out in the #MeToo trend have been "guilty because accused," and that this is not a useful legal or moral standard.

8. In my article, I further quoted Atwood: "As for vigilante justice -- condemnation without a trial -- it begins as a response to a lack of justice -- either the system is corrupt, as in prerevolutionary France, or there isn't one, as in the Wild West -- so people take things into their own hands."

9. On the morning of April 5, 2018, I noticed that my Facebook page -- my primary means of communicating with my widest audience -- had been "tagged" with a photo of a published letter to the editor of *Chronogram* complaining about the article. Following the photo of the published letter, the unedited version of the same letter, rejected by *Chronogram's* editors for being libelous, appeared. This letter included the accusation that I was a serial sexual predator.

10. The post was published the day prior by Julie Novak, co-founder of the TMI Project, which works collaboratively with OMEGA INSTITUTE on the subject of teaching women to write truthful testimonies and narratives.

11. In her April 4 Facebook post, which she said was written by a third party named Dana Barnett, she did not say "allegedly," but rather stated her claim as a foregone conclusion and called for people to submit their "stories" about me, in theory, consistent with the mission of the TMI Project.

12. In an April 7 Facebook post, Julie Novak, the co-founder of the TMI Project, compared my work to that of Harvey Weinstein, saying that "this community has given a pass to Eric all of these years because we didn't want to stop being entertained" [EXHIBIT B].

13. In contemporary society, a sexual predator is the worst thing a person can possibly be falsely accused of, particularly if their work requires the trust of the public and, in particular, of women.

14. A discussion of my alleged transgressions had also developed on the Hudson Valley Feminists group, a "closed" Facebook group of over 1,300 women and men in the Hudson Valley. In that discussion, various participants vowed to get me fired from all of my employment relationships, including OMEGA INSTITUTE, *Chronogram*, the *New York Daily News*, and Radio Kingston.

15. Eva Tenuto, the executive director and co-founder of the TMI Project and a partner of OMEGA INSTITUTE, intentionally misrepresented my writing in a public post to Facebook, making it look like I supported accused serial rapist Harvey Weinstein [EXHIBIT C]. The full quotation, with the missing text emphasized in **bold underlined**, is:

My concern began the moment Harvey Weinstein was taken down. That was quite a scandal. **We don't know most of it, either. While it was satisfying to see such a monster tumble**, scandal is never life-affirming. Rather, its effect is to repress sexual and loving feelings, spreading into our intimate relation-ships, contaminating healthy erotic desire and sowing mistrust. This is no way to run a free society; in fact, scandals are a good way to destroy one.

16. On or about April 14, Eva Tenuto, the executive director and co-founder of the TMI Project, and a partner of the OMEGA INSTITUTE, drove to OMEGA INSTITUTE in Rhinebeck, to speak to Robert Backus, executive director of OMEGA INSTITUTE, in an effort to have me fired based on the false claims and rumors that had been started by Julie Novak, her wife and co-founder of the TMI Project.

17. On Thursday, April 19, I received a letter from Robert Backus, executive director of OMEGA INSTITUTE, informing me that I had been fired and that any record of my existence would be deleted from the Institute's website [EXHIBIT D].

18. Prior to dismissing me, OMEGA INSTITUTE conducted no investigation of the allegations; it did not interview me; it did not ask for my version of events; and it did not seek exculpatory evidence or character witnesses. I was summarily dismissed on the word of Eva Tenuto, the executive director and co-founder of the TMI Project.

19. It is my view that as the co-founders, leaders and teachers of TMI Project, an organization purportedly devoted to truth telling, who carry considerable clout in the community, Julie Novak and Eva Tenuto should be held to the highest standards of integrity, veracity and accountability, and should not be spreading unverified rumors on the internet, or bringing those rumors to peoples' employers. This is especially vital when the organization involved is a tax-exempt charity whose principal officers must act consistently with their organization's stated mission.

20. As organizers and/or presenters and/or partners on the issue of "personal truth" for the world-renowned OMEGA INSTITUTE, they have an even more solemn

duty to handle the biographical material of others with the utmost integrity and regard for veracity.

21. I was fired by OMEGA INSTITUTE solely on the basis of unverified rumors, yet rumors which were presented with the clout of the executive director of the TMI Project, which lists the OMEGA INSTITUTE as one of its partners/sponsors.

22. Chrissa J. Santoro, an official of the OMEGA INSTITUTE, violated my employee confidentiality when she admitted to Lorna Tychostup that I am no longer a contractor for the Institute. Lorna then took that confirmation as proof of my conduct, and said she planned to go to the press, which is exactly why these things are kept confidential. **[EXHIBIT E]**.

23. My firing constitutes sex stereotyping and evidence of a hostile work environment, and which violate Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the New York State Human Rights Law.

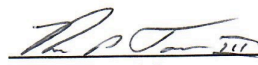
24. As a result of this firing, I have experienced pain, suffering, loss of sleep, loss of appetite, financial loss, extreme emotional duress, and humiliation in my small community. In the current environment, I have feared and continue to fear that my entire professional life might be destroyed.

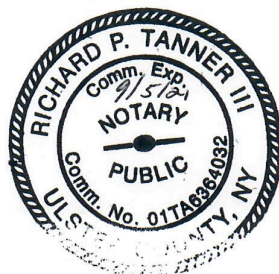
25. My firing by OMEGA INSTITUTE wrongly "verified" the false rumors about me, threatening my future employment in the radio business and my trusted relationship with the public, as well as tarnishing my reputation as an author and damaging my ability to carry out other professional activities.

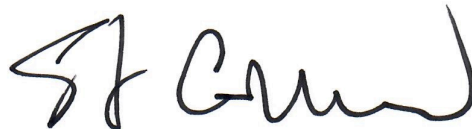
26. By this complaint, I am seeking a written retraction and apology by OMEGA INSTITUTE and any involved presenters or employees for the false claims made against me, whether privately or publicly; reinstatement of my writing contract; and mandatory libel training for all employees of the publishing office and administrative staff.

27. I am requesting the State Division of Human Rights to cross-file this complaint with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

SIGNED AND AFFIRMED BEFORE ME THIS 7 DAY OF MAY, 2018


Notary Public







Lucinda Abra, *Communion*, mixed media

Take a Step Back

It's taken me a while to figure out what's really going on with the #MeToo movement. I don't accept as valid what I don't understand, or what I see as serious problems with. I might, when I gain an understanding and see past the problems.

The #MeToo movement has been chaotic, and there are serious issues with it, which I'll get into in a moment. Finally, about five drafts into this article and after consulting many women in my life, I spoke with an old friend named Megan O'Connor, who was well on her way to becoming a midwife when I knew her as a journalism colleague 20 years ago.

Sometimes I need things put into language a kid can understand. She heard my frustration sorting out the issues and said in her calm and nonjudgmental style, "Think of it this way. The #MeToo movement has one purpose: To reveal the extent of sexual harassment in the workplace." If I didn't expect much more than that, then I would have it in context. That was all I needed to hear.

Workplace sexual harassment is a real thing—so real that we're discovering it's apparently (still) the norm.

#MeToo is intended as a pushback against that, calling attention to the issue and demanding change. That's no guarantee of solving the problem. But real activism is always messy. And sometimes it's necessary to break some rules and smash things to get the attention of people in power.

Let's see how things proceed from here—for example, let's see if we can do anything about an admitted sexual abuser that a majority of white women helped elect president. We might be witnessing a correction, not just of abusive conduct, but also to complicity with that conduct.

Scandals Are Not About Healing

My concern with #MeToo began right before activist Tarana Burke's political slogan was taken over by what I'm calling #Me2.0, the internet version. My concern began the moment Harvey Weinstein was taken down.

That was quite a scandal. We don't know most of it, either. While it was satisfying to see such a monster tumble, scandal is never life-affirming. Rather, its effect is to repress sexual and loving feelings, spreading into our intimate relationships, contaminating healthy erotic desire and sowing mistrust. This is no way to run a free society; in fact, scandals are a good way to destroy one.

Scandals terrify people, and most are already terrified. Ask any teenage boy who's afraid to ask a girl on a date, fearing he will be deemed a sexual predator. That is a form of tyranny.

Second, I, like many, am concerned this movement is often claimed for women only, sometimes aggressively. The purpose of #MeToo is supposedly ending sexism. Do we think we're going to do that with more sexism? Many men and boys are routinely sexually abused, which we know, among other places, from the billions paid by the Roman Catholic Church in recent decades to settle lawsuits. The sex abuse situation in prisons is ugly, and most prisoners are men of color who don't belong there. But what happens in prisons is easy to ignore, and is almost always ignored.

Solving the sexual assault problem for half the population—to the extent that's even true—is not solving it at all, particularly since most perpetrators were once victims; many victims become perps. More young boys than you care to imagine are inappropriately touched by supposed caregivers and others charged with responsibility for them—both male and female.

Three-Part Disharmony

There seem to be three main aspects to the #MeToo trend. One has been celebrities taking out other celebrities, outing their alleged sexual misconduct, which leads to an epic fall from grace. The reported misconduct often turns out to be disgusting and persistent, and somehow it went unchallenged for years or decades. We don't seem too curious about who all the enablers were, or what Human Resources had in its files. Other times, the alleged violation is immature but harmless behavior.

The second is that some noncelebrity women are finding a voice to express their previous experiences of workplace sexual harassment. This has expanded into coming out about other forms of abuse, ranging from catcalls to date rape to issues within the family. One thing we're learning is that, for many people, the entire sexual environment is one they associate with transgression and violation.

We really need to do some soul searching about how this came to be, how it's persisted so long, and how we're going to actually solve the problem. The women's liberation movement of the 1970s stopped far short of structural change. Lacking actual power, and seeking employment opportunities above all else, women went from one form of subservience to another.

I recently asked my readers if they had experienced, or knew of, any positive results from #MeToo—results in the real world, not on the internet, and not involving famous people. There seemed to be some.

One of my readers wrote, "The 'me too' movement has had a most definite cleansing effect on me. Since then, I have now been able to work on my feelings and self judgments about 'being weak' with [a man in my life]. Have also decided I am 'not a slut or a whore' or any other nonsense. I had NO IDEA of the stored up hurt and shame and hurt I had in me all of these years."

Someone else wrote, "My manager, in a face-to-face meeting, asked me if any of his actions have ever made me feel uncomfortable in any way. They hadn't, and I appreciated his proactive approach, though I doubt that I would have felt comfortable sharing with him that they had, in the event that they had. It's a challenging issue to deal with regardless of how well-intentioned someone may be."

Hmm, that sounds like more of the same thing that got us here. Does someone need to tell women—even now—that nobody gives you a voice? You already have one, and you either use it, or you don't use it.

Then there's the third kind of response: concern from women about larger issues.

One reader in the UK responded for herself and her friends, "This #MeToo thing is making us all very uncomfortable. Of course, it's emotionally satisfying in many cases to see long-term sexually abusive predators like Weinstein get called out and pulled down, but one thing we've noticed (and worry about) is that: 1. Most of the pushback by Weinstein and other men has been against accusers who are women of color. 2. There's been false equivalence made between making a pass/minor groping and violent abuse or sustained harassment. 3. It's untrue that somehow everything will be okay if the film industry, Senate, or whatever is 'purified' without structural change. 4. The possibility of 'kicking 'em in the balls' (direct self-defense) has been absent. 5. The daily, sustained abuse of women at the lower end of the pay scale, especially women working in hotels or more private domestic settings, or by the state in prisons/detention centers, has been completely out of the discussion. 6. Structural solutions like universal basic income, which would give every woman more power to refuse, have been completely out of the discussion. Last, but certainly not least, we're also worried about the complete lack of any process to determine whether a claimed incident happened or not."

She concluded, "We've all seen others or actually been accused ourselves of being 'rape apologists' when we've tried to help abusive men stop abusing before this, and now are worried that if we try to have a more nuanced discussion in public about #MeToo, then we'll be accused of 'rape apology' all over again."

Tale of the Author of *A Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood, author of *A Handmaid's Tale*, which is taken as the morality story of our day, wrote recently in the *Globe and Mail* about times in history when "the usual rules of evidence are bypassed." Many have pointed out that the men who have been taken out in the #MeToo trend have been "guilty because accused," and that this is not a useful legal or moral standard.

Atwood has a special place in the history of the women's movement, as one of its most articulate and inspiring authors and also as someone who has been repeatedly accused of being a bad feminist.

"Such things are always done in the name of ushering in a better world," Atwood wrote. "Sometimes they do usher one in, for a time anyway. Sometimes they are used as an excuse for new forms of oppression. As for vigilante justice—

condemnation without a trial—it begins as a response to a lack of justice—either the system is corrupt, as in prerevolutionary France, or there isn't one, as in the Wild West—so people take things into their own hands.

"But understandable and temporary vigilante justice can morph into a culturally solidified lynch-mob habit, in which the available mode of justice is thrown out the window, and extralegal power structures are put into place and maintained. The Cosa Nostra [the Mafia], for instance, began as a resistance to political tyranny."

She got in trouble with internet feminists for writing that.

Frail as Victorian Housewives?

Writing earlier this year in the *New York Times*, Daphne Merkin published an op-ed called, "Publicly, We Say #MeToo. Privately, We Have Misgivings."

She wrote, "Perhaps even more troubling is that we seem to be returning to a victimology paradigm for young women, in particular, in which they are perceived to be—and perceive themselves to be—as frail as Victorian housewives."

She continued, "What happened to women's agency? That's what I find myself wondering as I hear story after story of adult women who helplessly acquiesce to sexual demands. I find it especially curious given that a majority of women I know have been in situations in which men have come on to them—at work or otherwise. They have routinely said, 'I'm not interested' or 'Get your hands off me right now.' And they've taken the risk that comes with it."

"The fact that such unwelcome advances persist, and often in the office, is, yes, evidence of sexism and the abusive power of the patriarchy. But I don't believe that scattershot, life-destroying denunciations are the way to upend it. In our current climate, to be accused is to be convicted. Due process is nowhere to be found."

Among many other excellent points, she asks, "And what exactly are men being accused of? What is the difference between harassment and assault and 'inappropriate conduct'? There is a disturbing lack of clarity about the terms being thrown around and a lack of distinction regarding what the spectrum of objectionable behavior really is."

If this is some foreshadowing of the "the future is female," no thanks—I'll stick to patriarchy. At least there, one has a right to face and question one's accuser.

The shrill, sick irony of this scenario is that we've purged ourselves of a bunch of creepy entertainers and alleged newscasters, the Olympic gymnastics team doctor, and a bunch of other people whose behavior was well known, sometimes for decades. But someone who bragged about committing sexual assault received a majority of white women's votes and is still in power. That deserves a reckoning.

I was gratified that the anti-workplace-harassment movement joined forces with the nationwide protests by women on January 20 and 21. I have read that protest leaders then headed to Las Vegas to organize voter registration in swing states ahead of the 2018 congressional elections. That is called linking the issues.

It should be clear to men that it's time to take a step back and evaluate our ideas about who and what women are, and how to approach women in social and professional situations. It should also be clear that we all need to arrive at a mutually acceptable concept of respect, which can only come through a dialog.

Hashtags, protests, and taking out individual accusers is not structural change—and, moreover, not about personal healing. Those things are much deeper.

Anyone who has experienced sexual transgression and is still in pain needs to speak up where it matters, and get help. The first place that must happen is within their intimate relationships. Anyone who cannot share their history with their partner is not in a safe place.

A trend on the internet is not about actual healing and does not rise to the level of claiming power. Power is not a mood or a feeling. It's a state of being focused in the present, where a situation can be sized up, and necessary decisions made. Power is about commitment. It's about working together, toward tangible, productive goals, including working with one's presumed adversaries. ●

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READ Eric Francis Goppolino's weekly Planet Waves column.



Julie Novak Ashley Lynne I think that this community has given a pass to Eric all of these years because we didn't want to stop being entertained. We all loved his horoscopes. They took us out of our daily drivel and made life exciting, very much the same way that Harvey Weinstein's movie studio produced films that we loved—that we could escape into. But [#timesup](#) for our local Weinstein. There are other movie producers out there and plenty of other qualified astrologists who are not predators. [Chronogram](#): it's time to hire a new interpreter of our star signs. It's long overdue. [#followyourownintuition](#)

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View more replies

Saturday, April 7, 2018 at 7:33pm

EX B



Eva Tenuto shared a post.

4 April at 12:47 · 🌐

In February, at the height of the [#metoo](#) movement, Chronogram published this piece. One woman wrote a letter to the editor to share her perspective and it was printed this month, though not in full. I stand with her in outrage over this piece. The article is so troublesome, so filled with faulty logic and wrapped in deflection new-age packaging, it was hard to get through.

"My concern began the moment Harvey Weinstein was taken down," the author says. "That was quite a scandal... scandal is never life-affirming. ** Missing text* Rather, its effect is to repress sexual and loving feelings, spreading into our intimate relationships, contaminating healthy erotic desire and sowing mistrust. This is no way to run a free society; in fact, scandals are a good way to destroy one."

Come again? The day Weinstein was taken down was the day healthy erotic desire was compromised? Really? The day women came forward in droves, to confess the trauma they endured at the hands of a power-hungry monster, was the day YOU started to worry about a free society.

Those of us who've dealt with sexual harassment and assault have been worried for a lot longer than that. [#timesup](#)

FX C



Eric Francis Coppolino
Book of Blue
PO Box 3606
Kingston, NY 12402

April 18, 2018

Dear Eric Francis:

This letter is to notify you that as of this date, April 18, 2018, Omega Institute is terminating our agreement with you, entered into on or about February 5, 2018. As you know, the agreement called for you to provide horoscopes, for publication in our e-newsletter on a monthly basis for 12 months for a fee of \$4,500, which has already been paid in full. Although you have not fully performed your agreed-upon services for the year, we have decided to not seek reimbursement for the balance of the contract term.

As our relationship with you has terminated, Omega will remove from its e-newsletter, its website, and all other Omega materials all horoscopes authored by you as well as your name, likeness, and any photos.


Sincerely,

Robert C. Backus
CEO


Awakening the Best in the Human Spirit

FXD




 **Erica Taylor** That's awesome. Definitely some ammo to take to the higher ups at Chronogram. Is there anything in writing from Radio Kingston or Omega?

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 **Lorna Tychostup** In response to my query to Omega, I rec'd an email from its External Communications Director, Chrissa J. Santoro who wrote: "To address your question, we have ended our contractual relationship with Eric Francis and are no longer publishing his horoscope."

* || My feeling is that this actions should be made public and be accompanied by substantive info as to why - as we have seen in the media with other such cases. A public statement helps protect others into going into the future. Charlie Rose is being considered for a #MeToo-related program where he will interview men like Weinstein, etc. smh

Like · Reply · 3d

 **Erica Taylor** Saturday, April 28, 2018 at 5:42pm s, and especially the people he abused. What can we do, how can we get more out of them?

Like · Reply · 3d

 **Erica Taylor** Letter to Brian Mahoney the editor of the Chronogram. Will send to others there as well. Are there other letters that need more signatures? Please tag me and I'll add my name.



FX E