

Warner Bros. CEO's resignation sheds revealing light on Hollywood and #MeToo campaign

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There is no attractive side to this story, nor, at first glance, any attractive personality associated with it.

Warner Bros. Entertainment chairman and CEO Kevin Tsujihara, one of the American film industry's most powerful executives, resigned March 18 after texts were made public indicating he had promised to promote an actress' career in exchange for sex.

The episode, in all its squalid details, points to the corrupt atmosphere in Hollywood, the complicity of many of those desperate for a film career and the falsity and stupidity of the picture self-servingly drawn by the #MeToo campaign of universal female victimhood and martyrdom.

On March 6, the *Hollywood Reporter* revealed the existence of hundreds of texts between Tsujihara, British actress Charlotte Kirk and film business partners Brett Ratner and James Packer, the Australian billionaire.

The story that emerges is this: Packer, 45, began a relationship with Kirk, 20, a struggling actress, in 2012. In October 2013, Packer set up a rendezvous between Kirk and (the married) Tsujihara, for the ostensible purpose of advancing her career. Afterward, Kirk complained by text that Tsujihara was "not very nice" and that he only wanted to have sex.

By February 2014, Kirk was asking Tsujihara in a text about a television role she had auditioned for. The executive replied, "Yes, I spoke to our guys—I caused a bit of a stir... I don't usually call about casting about these types of roles. It's fine, I just need to be careful. ... Doesn't look great—let's look for a movie role."

The relationship between the pair apparently continued over the course of 2014. In September of that year, Kirk texted Tsujihara: "It was nice seeing you last night ... So your [you're] going to speak with Richard [Brenner, who runs New Line, a division of Warner Bros.] [about] what he has specifically?" Tsujihara, who was by now being somewhat evasive, merely replied: "Yes."

The *Hollywood Reporter* writes that for "much of the fall of that year [2014], she [Kirk] peppered Tsujihara with questions about the status of Brenner's efforts to get her work. Tsujihara told her, 'I'll follow up... [He's] trying his best.' But by spring 2015, communication between the two had become strained."

Meanwhile, Kirk was pushing Packer, her former boyfriend. She wrote in October 2014 that "putting me in one of your many movies shouldn't be a big deal. I did help u out with [Tsujihara]

which was hard for me but I did it for you."

This, in one of the most sordid features of a thoroughly sordid business, apparently refers to the fact—as the *Reporter* notes—that at the time "Packer set up Kirk's 2013 encounter with Tsujihara, he and Ratner were sealing a \$450 million deal with Warners. ... Kirk would later text Ratner complaining that she felt that she had been 'used as the icing on the cake for your finance deal with Warner Bros,' adding, 'It's gross what you all did to me!!!'"

When Kirk mentioned Tsujihara's name in an October 2014 text, Packer responded, "Hey that's not being cool." When Kirk wrote that Packer had promised that Tsujihara "would change my world," Packer shot back that she was "trying to blackmail" him "over a lie." Later, he threatened, "Don't push me. U'll [you'll] regret it ... Lying and blackmail are a bad start."

By March 2015, the actress was bluntly writing to Tsujihara, "You're very busy I know but when we were in that motel having sex u said u would help me and when u just ignore me like you're doing now it makes me feel used. Are u going to help me like u said u would?"

In July 2015 Kirk threatened to get a lawyer involved if Ratner did not live up to his alleged promises. Ratner later pleaded with Kirk to leave Tsujihara alone. He texted her that the studio chief could not get her jobs or auditions, "I told u this many times. Stop asking ... it's up to the directors and producers. If you are going to be f***ing someone for a part it should be a director or producer."

And so forth. We will spare the reader.

In our first comment on the Harvey Weinstein scandal in October 2017, we observed: "The extortion of sexual favors in exchange for employment or advancement was not discovered yesterday. The 'casting couch' is one of those phrases, along with the 'blacklist' and the 'Production Code,' that points to the genuinely vile side of American film studio operations. As Orson Welles once remarked about Hollywood, 'Well, the town is pretty terrible, you know.'" This is the harsh reality of corporate-owned, profit-driven film and television production.

Is Kirk a victim here? In the general sense, yes, including of her own aspirations and illusions. Clearly, however, at a certain point, Tsujihara and the others felt she had the upper hand, with the ability to make the embarrassing situation public. The *Hollywood Reporter* remarked that the relationship between Kirk and Tsujihara eventually "devolved into a protracted and increasingly

desperate struggle among Tsujihara, Ratner and Packer to manage Kirk's urgent demands to be cast in movies and TV series. At one point, Ratner accused Kirk of attempted 'extortion.'"

No one comes off well in this affair. But it should be remarked that the morals of the Hollywood crowd are not the morals of the general population. We pointed, in July 2018, to the fact that there was a great difference "between the situation facing a working class woman, on the one hand, for whom acquiescing to sexual pressures in a factory or office may be virtually a life-and-death issue, and the choices open to an entertainer or performer, on the other, who plays along in the interests of advancing a career."

In the entertainment industry at present, the combination of vast amounts of money and the life-altering power of a small number of executives, on the one hand, and the unlimited ambition and often selfishness and blindness of large numbers of attractive young people, on the other, is especially toxic.

And this takes place against the background of a terrible overall decline in Hollywood filmmaking, which has sunk to new depths in recent years. The machinations of Tsujihara, Kirk, Ratner (who has come under accusations of sexual misconduct) and Packer take on an especially ugly and pointless character. Soul-destroying sacrifices are being demanded and Faustian bargains being made for what? The films and television programs in which Kirk was attempting to land roles were almost all dreadful.

Tsujihara himself, the "first Asian American to run a major Hollywood studio," has no association with anything worthwhile in film production. Warners, of course, has a remarkable history, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, of producing dark, gritty and realistic works. This was the studio, despite its cutthroat and backward owners, of James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Joan Blondell, Barbara Stanwyck, Humphrey Bogart, Bette Davis, Olivia de Havilland and Paul Muni, of Raoul Walsh, Michael Curtiz and John Huston, of *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*, *Kid Galahad*, *High Sierra*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Casablanca* and *Mildred Pierce*.

American filmmaking today is a different world. Ozy, the online magazine, writes that "after graduating from the University of Southern California and earning his MBA at Stanford University, Tsujihara launched the tax prep site QuickTax Inc. That was before joining Warner Bros. in 1994, then as a special project director mostly devoted to wrangling the company's acquisition of Six Flags theme parks. Tsujihara quickly worked out a niche in online content that led him to being named the president of the home entertainment unit (it oversaw home video, online distribution and video games) in 2005. ...

"After being credited with helping save the *Hobbit* franchise from the maws of financial mismanagement, Tsujihara became one of three contenders openly competing to replace former Warner Bros. CEO Barry Meyer in September 2010. The company-sanctioned 'bake-off' ended up lasting more than two years and bruised egos as Tsujihara went from the dark-horse digital guru to the first Asian-American to run a Hollywood studio."

The Kirk-Tsujihara relationship, which was far from a one-way street, inevitably brings to mind the various #MeToo allegations against Harvey Weinstein and others. Open abuse no doubt occurs in Hollywood and corporate America in general, but how many

actresses (and actors) have felt the need, perhaps not as matter-of-factly as Kirk, to accommodate themselves *voluntarily* to these sorts of exploitative relationships?

Many aspiring performers consent to sexual activity in the hope of succeeding in a career, justifying it, as we have noted, "as one of the unpleasant overhead costs associated with 'making it,' or even self-deceptively bathing certain situations, which involve nothing at their core but cold, calculated moves, in a quasi-romantic aura."

Ozy writes that "in the complicated world of workplace sex and power dynamics, there are both similarities and differences between Tsujihara and the Weinstein case that sparked the #MeToo movement. 'The similarities are males with great amounts of power who can open doors for women,' says Rebecca Heiss, a doctor, public speaker and survivor of sexual assault. 'The difference ... is that the power dynamic was different. In the case of Weinstein, you're seeing rape, serious power differences, where here, when you're looking at the texts we're allowed to see, there seems to be an agreed-upon exchange.'"

How does Heiss know that the cases are different and that with Weinstein rape was involved? Merely because the accusers say so?

Each of the situations has its individual characteristics and perhaps few of the Weinstein accusers would have been as no-nonsense in her decision-making as Kirk, but we feel certain that among that number is far more than one who consented to sexual activity and later felt disappointment, bitterness, embarrassment or remorse, or all those emotions.

This is one of the complex, unpleasant realities that the American media would like to obscure. Hence the remarkably and conspicuously subdued response to the Kirk-Tsujihara scandal by the media outlets, including the *New York Times*, *New York* magazine and the *Guardian*, etc., the various feminist personalities and the middle class moralizers that have been raising a storm about the sexual misconduct issue since October 2017. It is not difficult to figure out why. The episode reveals too much about the actual social and economic dynamics in Hollywood for comfort.



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