

The #MeToo Movement: Redefining Power, Gender and Accountability in the 21st Century

Authors: Isabella Gambino, Arya Kunnothmannur, Kavya Thakrar, Emily Chi, Shriya

Gandhi, Walker Young, Alina Jani

In Our Own Words

Before policy and data, meet us, the people behind these pages: who we are, where we come from, and why this topic found us. The brief stories that follow are not evidence to be weighed but the ground we stand on—the moments that shaped our questions, what we notice, and what we refuse to ignore. We place these stories here in our own voices, so this chapter begins with our breath and our stakes—not someone else’s summary.

My name is Shriya Gandhi and I am a sophomore from Orange County, California in a time where social media is prevalent and it is important to use it as a tool of advocacy. I am a big advocate for women’s rights in encouraging women in higher position roles because they are told to “not to lead or be loud or be more lady-like”. With title 9 advocacy where we spread awareness through social media with the further goal to make schools implement it for younger children or bigger domestic violence. Recently, I went to Sacramento to present a bill to senators about protecting victims of domestic violence and how police have limited training for such cases. In order to exemplify my findings and how the lack of training policies affects the way women think of the legal system, this research paper was to share the value of the #MeToo Movements. We seem to shut down voices for people and give power to those who already have dominance. Therefore, this is for future generations learning to use social media for their benefit and to never shut down their voices.

My name is Walker Young, and I am a sixteen-year-old girl from Mill Valley, California. In an era where social media is a central part of daily life, I have found that despite its dangers, social media can be a powerful catalyst for change; the MeToo movement, for instance, relied on the stories of thousands to spark real institutional change. The MeToo movement shaped society in ways that directly affect me, giving me more legal protections, social supports, and understanding that previous generations lacked.

My name is Emily Chi, a fifteen-year-old girl from Anaheim, California. Growing up with immigrant parents, I learned to be careful with my words, to be polite, to be good, to be small. But I couldn't unsee the moments when girls were expected to stay quiet, to take up less space. That tension made me start asking questions about fairness, about whose voices get heard and whose don't. As I got older, I noticed how often conversations about harassment were avoided, brushed off, or joked about, even though the harm was real. This paper is part of a search for my own voice, exploring how those in the #MeToo movement turned quiet frustration into a collective power.

My name is Arya Kunnothmannur and I'm a seventeen-year-old girl from Southern California. Growing up in a patriarchal society has created expectations for how girls should act, behave, and present themselves. Not only has it set unrealistic standards, but the justice system has failed hundreds and thousands of women who have been violated in the worst way possible - to be a girl today is to know that if the unimaginable were ever to happen to you, your voice may simply disappear. To be a girl is to be called bossy when participating in class, to always be

conscious of whether your clothing is too “provocative” or might attract the wrong type of attention, and to *always* be scared for your safety. The #MeToo movement was a step in the right direction, but there’s still work to do.

My name is Alina Jani and I’m a fifteen-year-old girl from Yorba Linda, California. Growing up as a South Asian female I was told I could achieve anything and my gender wouldn’t hold me back. My parents have always been supportive of my goals, so I never had a reason to doubt the world around me. The #MeToo movement opened my eyes to the adverse reality of what women are facing today despite the progress our nation has made. Rather than feeling discouraged about the adversity in front of me, I choose to see this as an opportunity to create change and speak out for those who may not have a voice and create my own as I move forward in life.

My name is Kavya Thakrar, and I am a sixteen-year-old girl from Orange County, California. Growing up as a female of color, I have felt the weight of cultural and societal pressures that define what it means to be a woman; expectations, appearance, behavior, and how femininity should be expressed. These pressures do not exist alone; they reflect a system that often normalizes the silencing, objectification and stereotyping of women. The #MeToo movement emerged as a direct threat to that system, exposing how gendered power imbalances translate into abuse and injustice. For me, the movement is not just a moment in history but a framework to understand how everyday experiences of being a young woman connect to larger struggles around equality.

Introduction

Author: Walker Young, Shriya Gandhi

On October 15, 2017, a single tweet sparked a global sensation: “If you have been sexually harassed, respond to me too.” Within 24 hours, thousands of people had shared their story, exposing not only the widespread abuse but also revealing the culture of silence, fear, and complicity. The #MeToo Movement quickly became more than a hashtag; it became a catalyst for institutional change.

It's not just a movement; it's an act to show the lack of trust women have in the government. One is forced to conceal one's emotions because of the built-in fear. Existing law tells us that California requires basic training for handling domestic violence or sexual assault, but many officers report receiving only minimal instruction. There are not enough real connections to help them, especially with only about 12–15% of police officers being women, and even fewer are in leadership or investigative roles. There is a struggle to feel safe.

What is the #MeToo Movement?

Author: Kavya Thakrar

The #MeToo Movement is a global social movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault, giving victims the platform to amplify their voices and stories. Here, ‘MeToo’

refers both to the survivor-led movement founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 and to the 2017 social-media wave that amplified it.

This movement has sparked important conversations about patriarchy, womanhood, stereotypes, gender roles, politics, and accountability. The phrase ‘Me Too’ was first made popular in 2006 by American activist Tarana Burke. Burke made it her mission to create #MeToo as a youth program for junior and high school students, specifically those of underprivileged backgrounds, addressing the sexual violence outbreaks in the community. However, the movement turned global. In October 2017, the #MeToo movement became viral on social media after public allegations of sexual harassment against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Parallel hashtags emerged worldwide (e.g., #YoTambién, #BalanceTonPorc), showing similar patterns across industries and countries. Millions of people, women in particular, used those hashtags to share their sexual abuse stories. It became a way for survivors to stand in solidarity as a united front. Within mere weeks, the virality of the hashtag transformed the movement from a grassroots initiative to a global plea to address all forms of sexual assault.

Key Social Media Metrics of the #MeToo Movement

Metric	Volume	Timeframe	Source
First day	~ 200,000 tweets	24 hours after Alyssa Milano’s first tweet (October 2017)	ScienceDirect
First two weeks	>1.5 million tweets	October 15-28, 2017	ICPSR
First year	>19 million tweets	October 2017-September 30, 2018	Pew Research Center
Single day	528,143 tweets	September 9, 2018	ICPSR/Pew Research Center

Engagement (first week)	6–34 million users saw #MeToo stories	October 2017	PubMed
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The impact of the movement has been extremely profound; the hashtag has been used over 19 million times (Anderson & Toor, 2018). Not only did it create a pedestal for people to share their stories, but it also pressured institutions, industries, and people to treat sexual misconduct seriously. Reports also show that between 6 and 34 million Twitter users were exposed to at least one personal #MeToo story, demonstrating the scale of its reach. (Modrek & Chakalov, 2019). Additionally, according to an employer survey by Proskauer, 42% of respondent organizations reported an increase in harassment complaints since #MeToo (Proskauer, 2019). Beyond professional environments, the movement shaped societal attitudes by challenging narratives, such as the normalization of harassment. The movement also sparked conversations about consent, reinforcing that it is crucial and must be at the core of all relationships.

Like every other successful movement, the #MeToo movement faced backlash, hate, and criticism. People argue that the most publicized and widely known stories come from wealthy, Caucasian women, and the stories of marginalized communities, such as the working class, LGBTQIA+, and POC, are not as widespread. Additionally, others saw the movement as normalizing “cancel culture.” Ultimately, these debates underscore the complexities of achieving lasting social change and serve as a poignant reminder that, although progress has been made, the fight for justice and inclusivity remains ongoing.

Despite these challenges, the #MeToo movement has opened doors for broader conversations about power imbalances, stereotypes, gender inequality, and the importance of

listening to once-suppressed voices. The movement further emphasized that abuse can also be due to systemic issues rather than isolated circumstances. For society at large, it challenged the status quo and demanded a call for cultural change, acting as a turning point in how sexual misconduct and consent are understood. The #MeToo movement began as Tarana Burke's dream—a budding initiative with grassroots beginnings and a simple hashtag. Now, it has grown into one of the most influential movements of the 21st century. According to NORC at The University of Chicago, “Nearly two in three Americans (65%) now believe that sexual assault is a widespread problem in society” (NORC, 2018). As Burke herself explains, “I feel the reason people started using 'me too' is that there is beauty and power in those words. An exchange of empathy provides an entry point for a lot of people to see what healing feels like.” Her words capture the soul of the movement, as solidarity and empathy can facilitate healing, while also fueling the fight for justice and systemic change.

Next, we show how silence and power operated before the #MeToo movement, and what changes occurred afterward.

Social Norms Before the #MeToo Movement

Authors: Arya Kunnothmannur, Isabella Gambino

Before policy changed, culture taught people what to expect: who had power and who had to be quiet. Harassment and exploitation are not modern issues, but today's conversations and advocacy of these issues have made them a big topic of discussion today. For many industries, including Hollywood, sports, and politics, issues of power abuse and sexual harassment have occurred. Social and professional dynamics reinforced by our society have

allowed for the mistreatment of many to persist. Society's blind eye to issues of staying silent and in distress, mixed with the gaslighting that can occur when harassment is normalized and considered unimportant, are reasons why this issue is vital to be discussed and advocated for.

Entertainment (Hollywood) — Power, Reputation, and Silence

An example of this occurring in Hollywood is from Rose McGowan, who spoke out in the mid-20th century on her experience with abuse from Harvey Weinstein. She highlights that silence was the normalized and expected reaction in this industry. McGowan recalls her personal attack and how she was aware of the probable outcome, stating how “no one was going to believe me” (McGowan, 2018). The power that Weinstein had over McGowan displays the power imbalance in Hollywood, and the outcome McGowan saw most realistically shows the reinforcement of staying silent that many other victims face. Both these ideas, the power imbalance and the normalization of staying quiet, highlight this issue as a cause for concern, as this abuse should not be so normalized and common. Another Actress, Ashley Judd, spoke out against Weinstein and his behavior, saying it was an “open secret” or a known fact within the Hollywood industry. She recalls her experience as “terrifying. [She] knew it was going to happen, and [she] felt trapped,” going on to say that “speaking out wasn't an option...[her] career [would've] been ruined”. Judd's story specifically highlights the difficult decision many women faced, to remain silent on an issue directly affecting them and harming them or speak out and risk their career crumbling. The normalization of silence, both for industry or personal sake, and the normalization of the idea of speaking out would result in worse punishment than just remaining silent, are ways society has reinforced these people with protection to continue their abuse, displaying the need for action and retaliation, because the victim should not be more at risk of punishment than their abuser.

What this shows: In reputation-driven fields, the cost of speaking can be made higher than the cost of silence—exactly the imbalance #MeToo sought to reverse.

Both experiences shared by McGowen and Judd illuminate the normalization of abuse and the societal pressure to remain silent about one's experiences, combined with the protection abusers gain and the danger of speaking out for victims. Advocacy is necessary to challenge and break down the beliefs instilled in society. The first step is to raise awareness about these issues and the concerns they represent, and to acknowledge that they are deserving of attention and discussion.

The Sports Industry: The Harassment and Abuse of Athletes

In the sports industry, these issues also occur. Larry Nassar, a former Olympic physician, was caught in 2018 for over a decade of sexually abusing hundreds of young female athletes. Nassar's abuse persisted, and despite many women coming out about their experiences, they were shut down and told to remain silent, so the good reputation of sports remained. And it was not until 2018 that he was exposed due to the bravery of women who came forward to share their experiences, notably Simone Biles and Aly Raisman. Biles came out saying, "I never felt like I had permission to speak up," reinforcing this recurring idea of victims feeling unsafe and unprotected when speaking up about their experiences and feeling the pressure of industry and society to remain silent (Biles, 2021). Once Biles and Raisman spoke up, many more women came forward with their similar experiences, which were the beginning steps to the discussion of harassment and abuse within the sports industry. Biles' story serves as a reminder that speaking out can be beneficial, but her situation is unique, as she is a well-known gymnast. For many

lesser-known women, their experiences may not be reciprocated in the same way Biles was, highlighting another issue: the need to listen to all victims, not just those who are famous.

Within the sports industry, these actions of abuse were normalized, and athletes were expected to remain silent and tolerant of the abuse they faced. The reinforcement of staying silent for the sake of something or someone else, in this case, the sport industry's reputation, allows for this abuse to both persist and become easier to accomplish, with victims believing it is their role to remain silent.

What this shows: When gatekeepers control access to dreams, athletes may internalize silence as part of the job—until a trusted voice opens space for truth.

Corporate Workplaces — “Whispers” and Gatekeepers

Although some named people step forward about their experience with abuse in their respective corporate industries, many fear the negative publicity that comes with being known, so some choose to remain anonymous. A woman in the corporate sector looked back on her experiences with harassment and how, in this industry, harassment was persistent but unspoken about. She recalls how, “there were always whispers, but no one ever really said anything out loud. You could feel the tension whenever someone brought it up... and everyone would pretend it wasn’t happening.” The woman states how she began to see the pattern of silence that victims had, and was able to highlight how, in this industry, these occurrences were normal and were not to be spoken about or treated as anything out of the ordinary. She points this out because while predators are protected, victims are left isolated in their experience and inferior to predators, making it feel impossible to speak out. This sport highlights power dynamics, specifically in a professional environment, and how those in power can quietly and without repercussions engage

in harassment, without fear of confrontation or punishment. The idea of silence and the normalization of this behavior, as well as the fear of reaction and rejection when coming out, has made many feel forced to remain silent.

What this shows: In hierarchies where careers depend on references and approval, retaliation risk—real or perceived—keeps reports from becoming records.

Politics and Public Institutions — Speaking Truth to Power

The political sphere has also long been a setting in which harassment was not only ignored but often condoned, particularly when the perpetrators were powerful men. Anita Hill's testimony during the 1991 confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas was a turning point, though it did not immediately lead to the accountability that Hill and many others hoped for. Hill's courageous testimony about the sexual harassment she faced while working for Thomas was met with disbelief, personal attacks, and a concerted effort to discredit her. Her experience—being vilified for speaking out against a powerful man—was not uncommon.

Political industries also have their stories of sexual harassment being both ignored and disregarded. Anita Hill gave a testimony in 1991 that gave hope for this issue to be heard and dealt with, but unfortunately, the results were not that positive. Hill states in an interview documented in 1994 that, "[she] thought, if I don't do this now, I'll never have the chance again. But what if they don't believe me? What if they don't care?". Illuminated by Hill's words is the recurring idea of victims feeling conflicted about speaking out, on one hand knowing their experience is important and that this ongoing harassment must be advocated for, on the other, fearing people's perception and the general outcome of choosing to speak up. Hill speaking up

was another beneficial addition to this ongoing fight against harassment and abuse, sparking awareness among many other women in her field of politics about the importance of standing together and taking action for a better work environment.

Although there has been a shift in perception of victims' stories in the years after Hill's advocacy, there are still power dynamics and normalization of abusive behavior and harassment that are difficult to shake off. There is still also the persistent issue of victims refusing to speak up out of fear of their careers being damaged, the public's perception of their experience, and nothing coming from their story. For these reasons, the movement of advocating for and illuminating people's stories and giving them value is a vital thing, and it should be taken seriously.

What this shows: When power and legitimacy converge, institutional settings can amplify doubt toward victims and mute accountability for perpetrators.

Harassment and sexual abuse have become hot topics of discussion in today's world, but these issues have persisted for decades, often being underrepresented and unspoken of. In industries such as entertainment and sports, as well as corporate workspaces, similar experiences of power dynamics and the idea of remaining silent for the sake of reputation, or because it is normalized not to speak of these actions, have been perpetuated through decades of societal norms.

Across the cases presented above, we see common mechanisms that rewarded silence and punished disclosure:

- **Power asymmetry:** Careers, roles, or national teams controlled by a few decision-makers.
- **Retaliation risk:** Fear of lost jobs, playing time, visas, or future recommendations.
- **Closed processes & NDAs:** Complaints routed into opaque channels that rarely change culture.

- **Reputation protection:** Organizations prioritize brand over safety, especially in public-facing fields.
- **Normalization:** “That’s just how it is” stories that blur boundaries and lower expectations of safety.

These norms set the stage for **#MeToo**. When survivors spoke together, they changed the calculus: silence became harder to demand and institutional inaction harder to defend. Named or anonymous, the stories in this section insist that silence is not normal—and they map the work ahead: reshaping how victims are seen, rebuilding reporting paths that protect them, and ending the quiet normalization of abuse in workplaces.

Legal Norms Before the #MeToo Movement

Author: Walker Young

Law recognized harassment, but outsourced daily protection to internal policies that many feared to use.

What Laws Existed (Pre-#MeToo)

Before the #MeToo Movement, the primary federal law addressing sexual harassment was Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination “because of sex.” Title VII was enacted to ensure employee protection from discrimination based on sex, but in 1980, the EEOC issued guidance recognizing sexual harassment as sex discrimination, and in 1986, the Supreme Court confirmed that recognition in *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*. While Title VII was the central federal employment law, additional legal avenues, including Title IX (1972), tort laws (battery, assault, intentional infliction of emotional distress), and whistleblower protection laws, also addressed issues of sexual harassment. Despite establishing a legal basis,

these laws were often applied unevenly and insufficient in ensuring meaningful protection and accountability for survivors.

Key Supreme Court Cases (1986–1999)

During the 1980s to 1990s, key Supreme Court cases clarified that sexual harassment violated Title VII, recognizing it as a form of discrimination while also revealing gaps in protections for survivors. The case of *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* (1986) involved an employee who claimed repeated sexual harassment by supervisors and a “hostile work **environment**”. As a result of the case, the Supreme Court ruled that harassment does not need to involve economic change to violate the statute, establishing that a “claim of a hostile work environment” is actionable under Title VII if the conduct is unwelcome and severe or pervasive. Over a decade later, in *Faragher v. City of Boca Raton* (1998), Beth Ann Faragher brought actions against the city, claiming that her supervisors, Bill Terry and David Silverman, had created a “sexually hostile atmosphere,” violating Title VII. The court ruled that the supervisor's conduct was serious enough to constitute an abusive working environment; however, the city could not be held responsible, as the supervisor was not acting under the scope of their employment. The case clarified whether an employer is responsible for supervisor misconduct, while emphasizing the need for anti-harassment policies. That same year, in *Burlington Industries v. Ellerth*, the Supreme Court ruled that employers are vicariously liable for supervisors who create hostile working conditions for those they have the authority to supervise. However, employers can protect themselves if they demonstrate that they took steps to end the harassment and if the victim of the abuse failed to utilize the available complaint procedures. While these cases expanded recognition of sexual harassment under Title VII, they also created new barriers that made it more difficult for employees to receive proper protection.

EEOC Guidance—Influential but Nonbinding

While the Supreme Court rulings shaped sexual harassment law, the application of Title VII was influenced by the EEOC's policy interpretations. In 1980, sexual harassment was officially defined as a form of sex discrimination under Title VII, laying the guidelines for the two main forms of harassment, "quid pro quo" and "hostile work environment," clarifying that sexual harassment violates the statute. In 1997, the EEOC further explained that harassment includes unwelcome conduct that affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with one's job performance, and/or creates an offensive, intimidating, or hostile work environment.

However, the EEOC guidelines are not legally binding. In the 1997 fact sheet, the EEOC states that "the contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way." The statement reveals that the EEOC's policies act primarily as a resource, rather than a legally binding document. So, while EEOC guidance helped translate Title VII into workplace practice, its nonbinding nature limited real-world protection when employers failed to act.

Other Avenues (Title IX, Torts, Whistleblower)—Why They Fell Short

While Title VII was the only federal law and the central form of protection at that time, other legal avenues, such as Title IX, tort Laws, and whistleblower protections, existed; however, they were often limited in their scope and effectiveness. In 1972, Title IX was established under the Education Amendment. It stated that all federally funded education programs are required to enforce Title IX, which prohibits sex-based harassment, sexual violence, pregnancy discrimination, sex-based discrimination in courses and programs, and more. Unfortunately, enforcement is rarely carried out, and violations are often left unaddressed, allowing systemic injustices in education systems to persist without institutional reform. In addition to Title IX,

Tort laws offer an alternative legal avenue. Tort laws protect individuals under civil laws, which expand but are not limited to intentional infliction of emotional distress, battery, and assault. Because Torts are defined by common law, legal enforcement is left to the judges; whether something qualifies as a legal wrong is subject to interpretation, leading to unpredictability and inconsistency in decisions. Even when successful, Tort Laws address individual claims and fail to address the systemic issues at play. Finally, the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 protects federal employees from retaliation if they report employer wrongdoing. Employees can't be demoted, fired, or retaliated against for making a protected claim. Despite this, these protections only apply to a select group of federal employees and industries, rather than all employees, and do not directly target sexual harassment. While these tools theoretically provide additional protection for survivors, in reality, they leave significant gaps in protection, offering survivors narrow coverage and limited systemic enforcement.

Net Effect: Recognition with Escape Hatches

Although Title VII, Title IX, Tort laws, and Whistleblower Protections theoretically provided individuals with protection from sexual harassment, their structural limitations left survivors without proper legal avenues to protect themselves. Title VII was constrained by employer protection and non-binding EEOC guidelines. Title IX enforcement was not mandated, allowing systemic injustice to persist without punishment. Tort Laws were subject to judicial interpretation, leading to inconsistent results. While also addressing the individual's claim rather than the underlying issue. Finally, whistleblower protections applied only to a narrow scope of federal employees and didn't directly address sexual harassment. Collectively, these legal gaps and the failure of enforcement left survivors without legal avenues and proper protection,

underscoring the need for legislative change and ultimately setting the stage for the #MeToo movement.

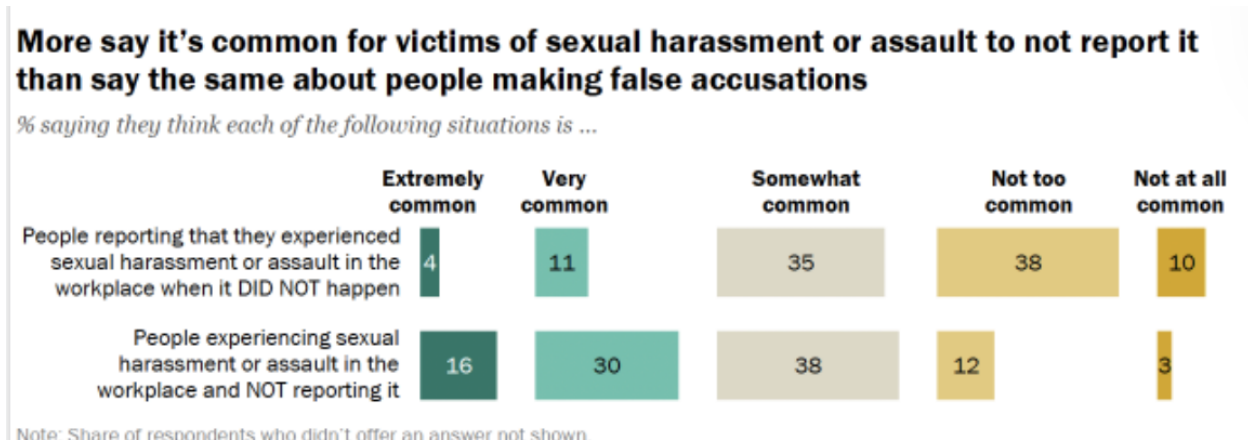
How the #MeToo Movement is a Social Movement

Author: Shriya Gandhi

The Me Too Movement was bigger than a movement to speak out; it eventually became a social movement for essential reasons. The first being how it wasn't just one person's experience, it was a collective experience that wasn't a small number. Studies estimate that 1 in 4 women experience sexual assault or harassment. It was a public demand for change, which secondly questioned patriarchal power.

A big factor in the Me Too Movement was the idea that many women feared people in higher positions because it could lead to more harm. It leads to intense trauma where people are unable to trust our police; they seem to question the entirety of the legal system, creating the idea that they should rather be silenced. An important segment is the famous people who were able to get away from these allegations, whether in the past or present. In the time before that arose because of this movement, there was the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard case, which drew global attention and raised questions on the credibility of the people we idolize. It highlights the importance of speaking out and but is part of larger cultural conversations about power and accountability. However, this idea is presented in our president, Donald Trump, where he faced sexual misconduct allegations with over 20 women, yet he was elected President in 2016 and

remains a major political figure.



Data from Pew Research on September 29, 2022 analyzing how work environments truly are from an American's perspectives.

Workplaces are environments that are meant to be cohesive but when the fear of climbing the ladder, many women tend to stay quiet in order to not lose jobs. This shocking data provided exemplifies the need to make women believe that it is possible to be safe and speak our voices

Another important thing to consider is the reliance on digital activism. In our community, it can be reflected that technology has recently become such a necessary aspect because many new parts have come out and spread important slogans like the #MeToo Movement. I think that there are many ways to connect, and it should not be limited to social media. It demonstrated the evolution and how this simple hashtag created by Alyssa Milano became a global rallying cry. Therefore, the Me Too Movement is a social movement that will affect many and clarify many loopholes that need to be addressed and may still be a prominent issue now.

Successes and Failures of the #MeToo Movement

Author: Arya Kunnothmannur

#MeToo changed conversations and consequences—and exposed who still gets left out. It raised awareness, emboldened reporting, and pressed institutions to act, even as blind spots and backlash surfaced.

The movement, which became globally amplified in the late 2010s, achieved undeniable victories in its goal of raising awareness and supporting survivors of sexual violence. However, as we enter a new social landscape and the discourse around sexual misconduct has shifted, it is imperative to look at the #MeToo Movement through a multi-faceted lens and recognize where **we still must grow as a society.**

What Changed Fast: Awareness & Conversation

One of the most immediate and recognizable successes of the #MeTooMovement was its ability to push sexual misconduct to the forefront of public discourse. Before its widespread attention, discussions about sexual violence were often stigmatized and dismissed - the movement shifted that narrative. The increased normalization of these topics helped dismantle the shame and secrecy surrounding sexual violence. It encouraged survivors to share their stories, and as more and more did so, others felt empowered to come out with their own stories, essentially sparking a global movement against sexual harassment and misconduct. The movement also created recognition of what sexual violence, abuse, and misconduct looked like. Study findings show that people were more likely to label their past experiences as sexual assault post #MeToo, demonstrating that it had educational impacts. It pushed concepts like consent, rape culture, and victim-blaming into mainstream conversation and brought these dialogues into workplaces, schools, and other institutions. This forced a reevaluation of policy – often, this included an

enforced harassment reporting system, better training for workplace conduct, and expanding DEI to implement zero-tolerance policies.

Most visibly, the #MeToo Movement brought accountability to high-profile figures who had long evaded real consequences. People came forward about their experiences, and men like Harvey Weinstein and Bill Cosby faced legal or professional repercussions. These included TV producers, U.S. senators, business executives, and others in positions of power. This cultural shift represented the first time influential people were held responsible for their actions.

The #MeToo Movement was transformational in changing the way people discuss sexual violence. Not only did it expose thousands of perpetrators, but it also broke the stigma and gave survivors a voice. It was not without its limitations, however, as the initial momentum and excitement faded, a harsher reality emerged.

Who Wasn't Heard: Representation Gaps

While the movement elevated the voices of sexual violence survivors, the media disproportionately overrepresented survivors as white women in the entertainment or political sectors. Ironically, marginalized groups were excluded from the narrative despite the #MeToo Movement being started by a woman of color. Although it was a movement meant to expand representation, it perpetuated existing symptoms of oppression. People of color, LGBTQ+, and low-income groups experience sexual violence at disproportionately high rates but receive the least media coverage or publicity.

Policy & Practice: Progress and Enforcement Gaps

While the movement's reliance on social media allowed for mass mobilization, it also contributed to a “cancel culture” dynamic on both sides. For the perpetrators, image and likability played a role in how the public perceived the allegations against them. While some

escaped relatively unscathed, others were professionally and socially ostracized. For survivors, online culture often turned on them, and they faced cyberbullying and harassment. This is evident in the case of USA Gymnastics athletes, who were institutionally silenced and criticized by the media. This revealed a tension between survivor advocacy, due process, and the use of social media.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the movement was unable to create lasting, institutional change. Although some states, such as New York and California, have passed legislation in response to the #MeToo Movement, most of these policies have seen little to no enforcement. In the workplace, efforts have been largely superficial, with companies making performative attempts to showcase inclusion and zero tolerance, rather than reevaluating their accountability mechanisms. Advocates argue that the movement failed to translate the momentum into structural reform, limiting its long-term effectiveness in preventing future abuse.

The Legacy of the #MeToo Movement

Author: Emily Chi

The #MeToo movement left a legacy that reshaped attitudes towards sexual misconduct and the empowerment of women. Although the social movement had its faults, it created a cultural shift in attitudes towards silence, solidarity, institutions, and the world. While backlash and resurgence in the patriarchy were associated with its outcome, this section will focus on the positive aspects of the movement's legacy. Even without major legislative reform, #MeToo

created profound social awareness, empowered survivors, and set the stage for lasting cultural change.

As covered earlier, sexual harassment and assault were rarely discussed topics before the movement. It was almost seen as a taboo or private information that made people uncomfortable when shared. There was a field around the sensitive topic that was usually avoided, when possible, especially in public. As a result, fewer crimes were reported to authorities because merely discussing the topic felt wrong. #MeToo was a movement that started a discussion. Reports of sex crimes increased by 7% in the U.S. ($\approx 4,600$ additional cases) and 14% in OECD countries ($\approx 11,600$ additional cases) in late 2017 (Cummings, 2020). Although the statistic may seem small, the movement created a significant leap towards social justice for victims around the world. It allowed them to speak out with the confidence of being heard.



#MeToo rally in Los Angeles, California, NBC News Archives, November 12th, 2017

Survivors were not only given a better chance of justice by simply speaking out, but the movement created more empathy and understanding in humanity. When millions of stories were shared, victims were shown that they weren't alone, reducing stigma and fear around the topic.

The beginning of any discussion creates more opportunities for someone's story to be heard, for someone to receive justice, and for a new discussion to start, regardless of the topic. Any social movement, including this one, changes an individual's behavior and thought behind making decisions through social norms. Although legislative aspects have fallen short of the movement's expectations, creating awareness is almost equally important in taking a step towards institutionalized change.

The movement continued, empowering and creating solidarity for survivors. The global #MeToo movement validated victims, creating a community of people who share their experiences. The phrase "You are not alone" became a global refrain, a slogan for survivors of any traumatic event. The simple act of acknowledging and knowing that one is acknowledged creates an impact that starts social reforms. Social media significantly accelerated the movement as stories were shared with larger audiences at incredible speed. Platforms have been evolving the way people can communicate by increasing the exposure to highly stigmatized issues in society. On Reddit and X (formerly Twitter), personal narratives accompanied by emotional responses were shared, along with advocacy and news updates. Findings suggest that while the #MeToo movement has sparked significant dialogue, the nature of that dialogue varies across platforms, reflecting different user experiences and emotional landscapes (Manikonda et al., 2018). Through viral social media posts featuring the hashtag and personal stories shared in discussions, the movement demonstrates how society manages itself through modern-day technologies and advancements. People sharing and seeing experiences have resonated with and

connected with people who might have never known this issue. The survivor-led storytelling created emotional impact on its listeners, causing people to believe victims rather than dismissing them. Allowing people to be aware of this matter will affect what they see around them. Awareness leads to action. Individuals will have a greater willingness to intervene as bystanders, call out misconduct, and support victims.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most significant failures of the movement was its inability to effect real legislative change. However, # MeToo's role as a social movement has helped create change in everyday situations. The movement catalyzed shifts in workplace policies, although it did not change federal legislation, prompting organizations and governments to prevent misconduct and protect employees proactively. There are concrete changes in workplace norms and policies that have adopted preventive measures to cultivate safer environments. Rather than federal law and order, change was created through social pressures to protect human rights.

Many employers in states such as California, New York, Illinois, Connecticut, Delaware, and Washington are required by state-level laws to provide regular training in taking proactive measures and anticipating harassment risks before incidents occur, rather than simply reacting after the fact (Fernandez, 2019). Organizations implemented mandatory bystander intervention training, empowering employees to speak up safely when witnessing harassment. Workplace reporting systems, ethics hotlines, and stronger complaint mechanisms also became more prevalent. From large corporations to small businesses, annual, interactive anti-harassment training is provided. In six states, including California and New York, roughly 20% of American workers are now covered by such programs (Fernandez, 2019). In the UK, from October 26, 2024, employers are legally required to anticipate potential sexual harassment scenarios and take

“reasonable steps” to prevent them. Failure to do so can trigger punitive enforcement or compensation increases of up to 25% (Middlehurst, 2024). This marks a significant shift toward institutional responsibility, requiring employers to think proactively, implement preventive measures, conduct thorough risk assessments, and foster a respectful workplace culture.

These policy developments demonstrate that the #MeToo movement has prompted genuine institutional change, from expanding mandatory training in U.S. workplaces to legally requiring proactive measures in the UK, resulting in a shift from passive compliance to active prevention and education. Although the movement failed to create federal change in the US, it achieved significant social progress, reshaping institutions that are part of everyday life.

Most importantly, #MeToo has permanently reshaped the societal understanding of power, consent, and survivor solidarity, casting its influence beyond political moments to bring about enduring cultural transformation. The movement succeeded in achieving its primary goal from the outset: bringing about change in society. Tarana Burke, the founder of the movement, reflects on how #MeToo transcended “viral moments” to reframe sexual violence as a systemic social justice issue. She emphasizes that the movement’s enduring success lies in reimagining safety, bodily autonomy, and community responsibility, rather than merely focusing on individual cases (Burke, 2022). At its core, #MeToo centers empowerment through empathy: “the power of ‘Me Too’ is rooted in its ability to connect women together in an act of radical empathy.” (Brook, 2018). Burke emphasizes that empathy, rather than judgment, empowers survivors by connecting women together in an act of radical empathy. As Burke reflects years later: “More than any law... this movement has created visibility and community for those of us who thought we might go to our grave bearing a shame that was never ours to carry.” (Burke, 2022). She explains how having a community carry a burden and share the pain is one of the

most powerful things people can do as a society. By creating this kind of humanity in the world, people are encouraged to have pride in themselves, knowing that there is always support behind them. She stresses that #MeToo was about transforming culture, not simply calling out bad actors, but reshaping systems that allow violence to persist and to address the broader systems enabling sexual violence. Together, these transformations point to a cultural legacy built on empathy, visibility, and structural reframing, a strong foundation for future social justice work.

While the #MeToo movement did not rely on sweeping legislative reform, its cultural impact has been profound: it has redefined how society discusses power, consent, and accountability. Rather than being imposed from above, #MeToo gained force from millions of voices rising together from below. Voices are not afraid to be heard; communities are built in solitude; institutionalized change creates safer workplaces; and a long-term cultural legacy remains. The movement demonstrates that social movements can reshape the cultural landscape even in the absence of immediate legal reform. By challenging silence and stigma, #MeToo has laid the groundwork for future legal and institutional reforms to succeed. If cultural transformation precedes legislative reform, #MeToo proves that deep, lasting change begins not in courtrooms, but in conversations.

Resurgence of the Patriarchy

Author: Kavya Thakrar

While the #MeToo movement has brought influential attention to sexual abuse and misconduct, it has also received backlash, rooted in the resurgence of the patriarchy and the modern digital age, such as the rising popularity of TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat.

With the amplified success of the #MeToo movement, traditionalist reactions began to resurface, particularly among young men navigating gender norms and easily influenced by “manfluencers.” Research shows that social media platforms more commonly display toxic masculinity and sexist content. A report by University College London (UCL), in partnership with the University of Kent, revealed an increase in misogynistic content on TikTok’s “For You” page within just five days. (*Social Media Algorithms Amplify Misogynistic Content to Teens*, 2024) These messages then infiltrate schools and youth culture more broadly, normalizing harmful ideologies among adolescents. Additionally, studies like “From Manosphere to Mainstream,” written by Alexander Dhoest from the University of Antwerp, Belgium, highlight how traditional, old-school depictions of masculinity are highlighted online. These representations frame women as submissive, silent, and weak, further conveying the power imbalances between males and females, and are romanticized in thriving online platforms (Dhoest, 2025).

Central to this resurgence of the patriarchy, especially in the digital space, is Andrew Tate, a highly controversial figure, hailed as “the king of toxic masculinity.” He frames female empowerment, the exploration of what it means to be a woman, and movements such as the #MeToo movement as not only negative, but existential threats to the male gender. He portrays women as being morally deficient objects and asserts male dominance as biological. He has amassed a large following, combining self-help with misogynistic narratives, dominance, materialism, and the “boys don’t cry” mentality as the secret to male identity.

The consequences, however, go far beyond the digital realm. A study conducted by *The Man Cave* reported that 28% of teenage boys in Australia looked up to Tate, and 36% of them found him relatable (Pead & Hawley, 2023). This proves that Tate's influence extends into the daily lives of impressionable young men, who absorb damaging information during the crucial years of their development. Tate undoes the progress we've made as a generation. In social settings to educational institutions, boys echo Tate's gospel, embedding these ideas and creating environments where girls feel inferior. Simultaneously, boys themselves also face risks. Tate's warped version of masculinity emphasizes unrealistic dominance and emotional suppression, traits linked to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and violence. Tate's influence can act as a gateway where boys are further manipulated into seeing gender equality as a threat, ultimately reinforcing the patriarchy that the #MeToo movement tried to dismantle.

Tate operates within a larger realm, commonly referred to as the "manosphere." The manosphere is not a simple community, but rather an interconnected realm of "manfluencers" perpetuating toxic narratives and offering their millions of followers, often young men, a distorted image of womanhood. One significant figure, besides Tate, is Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist who rose to fame by critiquing feminism and stating that gender equality is dangerous and untraditional. For many young men, his lectures provide intellectual backing to ideas that reinforce patriarchy, cloaking regressive views in the language of psychology and order.

Another figure associated with the manosphere from a political angle is Ben Shapiro, a right-wing commentator and co-founder of *The Daily Wire*. Unlike Tate, Shapiro doesn't necessarily position himself as a lifestyle coach or "manfluencer," but he heavily critiques

feminism, the #MeToo movement, and progressive politics, which strongly resonate with efforts to bring back traditional hierarchies. In a YouTube video from The Ben Shapiro Show titled “*Is #MeToo Falling Apart?*”, he claims that the mantra of “believing all women” is not credible and that the support for the movement may falter. Collectively, Shapiro’s views suggest that he questions the #MeToo movement’s “believe all women” approach, arguing that disregarding due process could erode trust in both survivors and the system intended to protect them.

While the influence of figures like Tate and Shapiro is undeniable, educators and policymakers are beginning to recognize the urgency of addressing this digital resurgence of patriarchy. In the United Kingdom, teachers have reported a surge in misogyny among boys who mimic Andrew Tate after watching his videos. A survey by the NASUWT union found that social media was the number one cause of poor student behavior, with one teacher explaining: “A lot of the students are influenced by Tate and Trump, they spout racist, homophobic, transphobic, and sexist comments in every conversation and don’t believe there will be consequences.” Others described ten-year-old boys refusing to speak to female teachers because they “follow Andrew Tate and think he is amazing with all his cars and women and how women should be treated.” These examples reveal how Tate’s rhetoric has moved beyond digital spaces into classrooms, shaping attitudes, disrespecting female authority, and reinforcing patriarchal beliefs from an early age (Adams, 2025).

At the same time, leaders of the #MeToo movement emphasize that, despite backlash, its core purpose remains vital. Tarana Burke, founder of the movement, has argued that #MeToo is not over, but instead evolving, and its strength remains intact. Burke reminds us that the heart of the movement is not simply to expose perpetrators, but to create cultural and systemic shifts

where survivors are heard and believed. Ultimately, the #MeToo continues to shape workplaces, schools, and communities, even in the face of digital patriarchy.

The resurgence of patriarchal voices in the manosphere demonstrates that progress is not always linear. The digital age has given misogyny new platforms and vessels, but it has also given survivors new tools for connection and amplification. The challenge moving forward is whether society can harness the momentum of #MeToo while addressing the backlash it has provoked.

The Future

Author: Alina Jani

Culture moved first; now the task is to convert cultural shifts into law, institutional practice, and education.

The #MeToo movement allowed many women to speak up about their experiences with sexual harassment, assault, and much more, but what impact did the movement have on the world? What would the future look like after the #MeToo movement? How did the movement spark growth? What changes still need to be considered to continue this global evolution?

The #MeToo movement sparked a global conversation on sexual harassment, abuse, and violence, leading to workplace policy reforms and increased awareness in many countries globally. However, even as we look closely at positive examples of change, it is also important to be aware of the legal, institutional and educational opportunities that still exist and are limiting the possibility of future change to come as well as the prospects that exist around us that could be impactful for the future.

Switzerland is a clear example of a society that has “increased awareness and mobilization”, sparking conversations about sexual harassment and discrimination as a result of the #MeToo movement. Women's marches in cities like Zurich drew multigenerational crowds, signaling a push for change. Workplace Policies such as the Gender Equality Act, Code of Obligations, and Employment Act were also updated to help define sexual harassment and protect employees’ personal integrity and were inspired by international standards like the 2019 ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment at Work. Swiss employers also began revisiting internal policies post #MeToo with reforms emphasizing clear definitions of sexual harassment in the workplace, trained contact persons to support victims, and preventive measures like banning pornographic material in the workplace. Employees have also become empowered with stronger complaint mechanisms, and are protected from employment dismissal during harassment-related proceedings for six months after a case has closed to prevent retaliation.

Sweden is another country that has strengthened sexual consent-based rape laws focusing on proof of affirmative consent to disprove rape, as well as proactive gender inequality policies, noting changes in the workplace such as requiring employers to prevent sexual harassment, as well as government-led initiatives to improve workplace safety. Lastly Sweden’s culture was also impacted as there was high public engagement from over 60 professional groups with their own respective #MeToo campaigns and policy responsiveness. However, despite Sweden's efforts to create reforms and policies that protect people and citizens, many victims were still found to be trapped in the perils of the legal system.

Sweden, which is often praised for its gender equality, struggled to respond meaningfully to the #MeToo movement within their legal system. The Cissi Wallin case is an example of a victim of their legal system today. In an article titled “The Importance of Believing Women,” the

high-profile case of journalist Cissi Wallin details how Wallin publicly accuses her fellow journalist, Fredrik Virtanen, of raping her in 2006. In 2010, Wallin disclosed the rape and did not name him, but called him a “high-profile media man”. After the article was posted, many women started to speak out, saying they had experienced the same assault and harassment by a similar man. As Cissi heard all the women’s stories, she began to rally the women to speak out as a group. However, due to fear, all the women withdrew. In 2011, Wallin went to the police and reported her case alone. The case was closed due to “lack of sustainable evidence,” and Wallin was convicted of defamation by the Swedish government, stating she had reported false information against Fredrik Virtanen. This outcome sparked national debate, revealing a disconnect between Sweden’s progressive reputation on gender equality and the reality of how its institutions treat survivors of sexual violence. The legal system prioritized protecting Virtanen, the accused’s, reputation over acknowledging patterns of abuse.

As we examine Wallin’s case example in Sweden, it is clear that the future of the #MeToo movement still requires policy changes in countries to allow victims the freedom to speak out without fear, both in terms of content and timing. New reforms like the Speak Out Act, now in the US, in states such as Virginia, Rhode Island, and Colorado, prohibit pre-dispute NDAs in cases of sexual harassment and assault. Adopting reforms such as these gives survivors more freedom to speak out and seek accountability without being accused of defamation. Compiled with the extension of the statute of limitations to report a harassment case, survivors can process their trauma before coming forward, seeking a more realistic window to seek justice. California and New York have extended the statute of limitations for filing harassment claims from one year to three years, demonstrating progress in this area.

Institutionally, many abusers are walking freely without punishment, even after a harassment report has been submitted, due to the lack of institutional consequences. According to RAINN statistics, 98% of sexual assault perpetrators walk free without being held fully accountable; therefore, laws need to be created to punish abusers. There are many women who haven't gotten justice because the accused has a reputation or "has such a bright future". Consequences for abusers should be designed not only to hold individuals accountable but also to protect survivors, prevent future harm, and shift cultural norms. Employers should have clear policies that allow for disciplinary action, including firing or suspension, when abuse or harassment occurs. Another consequence could be the loss of licenses or credentials in fields such as medicine, law, or education. In a public speaking setting, institutions can bar abusers from participating in speaking engagements, leadership roles, or public-facing positions to prevent further harm and demonstrate accountability. These are just a few of the consequences that could be created so that an abuser is not walking around without any accountability for their actions while the victim is suffering.

On the Education front, children exposed to violence at home are at higher risk of repeating those patterns. To counter this, trauma-informed programs that focus on emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and empathy-building help young people process their experiences and develop healthier coping strategies, reducing the likelihood of future harm. Attachment, Regulation & Competency (ARC) is a program that is used in schools, shelters, and clinical settings today that focuses on survival-based coping through awareness, tolerance, and empowerment. Future generations are now being taught about abuse and assault in ways that aim to break cycles of violence, promote empathy, and build safer communities. Schools and youth programs are increasingly integrating lessons on consent, boundaries, and respectful

communication. These lessons help children and teens understand what healthy relationships look like and how to recognize red flags. Children and Teens are being taught how to identify and prevent abuse, not just physical, but also emotional, psychological, and digital, to help break the cycle of intergenerational violence.

The #MeToo movement has reshaped global discourse, driving bold reforms in both government and corporations, and has empowered survivors to speak out. This movement has sparked growth in many countries, bringing awareness and impact in the workplace and leading to reforms that protect victims. Yet, as with any set of reforms, they can often reveal opportunities for improvement from a legal, institutional, and educational standpoint. The future hinges on translating cultural awareness into robust legal protections, proactive policies, and generational education, ensuring that movements like #MeToo not only spark change but also create a space for future global conversation.

Conclusion

Author: Emily Chi and Shriya Gandhi

The #MeToo movement began as a call to break the silence, and it forced institutions and publics to confront what had long been minimized: sexual harassment and assault. Returning to our guiding question, “What have been the major accomplishments and limitations of #MeToo, and what do they reveal about the challenges of achieving lasting cultural change?” The answer lies in the dual nature of its legacy. As a social movement rather than a legislative one, #MeToo succeeded in raising awareness, shifting cultural norms, and

empowering survivors to speak out. The evidence shows that reporting of sex crimes rose across the US in the months following its viral spread, signaling lowered stigma and pressure on institutions to respond. Workplaces, schools, and media outlets revisited policies, training, and norms; some states curtailed NDAs or extended time limits. Culture moved first.

At the same time, its limitations cannot be ignored. Police and courts often struggled to respond effectively, Title IX protections were weakened, and many survivors, especially from marginalized communities, remained unheard. The backlash, from online polarization to the resurgence of “old rules” in new packaging, shows that cultural change is never linear. These challenges don’t just mark failures; they outline the unfinished work of building durable, inclusive systems. Social media can hold people accountable, but it can also turn into a dogpile. Without good safeguards, speaking up can put people at risk.

Looking ahead, the future of #MeToo’s legacy depends on bridging the gap between cultural awareness and systemic reform. The movement has already proven that voices united can rewrite norms, and its ripple effects continue to be felt globally. With a renewed focus on legislation, education, and broader representation, #MeToo can serve not just as a moment, but as a lasting foundation. Its greatest achievement may not be the conversations it started in 2017, but the generations it inspires to carry them forward. Future movements will move toward a world where speaking out is not an act of courage, but an expectation, and where justice is not the exception, but the norm.

Our community is bigger together, and it's said best by Tarana Burke, the founder, who writes, “Me Too is about letting survivors know that they are not alone, and that a movement for radical healing is happening and possible.” When a victim is faced with the difficult decision of

choosing to endure the pain because of the fear, it questions our society's future, where we give no opportunity for women to speak. The collective voices we have together are what matters, and the need for people to share their voices and limit perpetuation to get away from their actions. So, we end on an important question of how we can create a society where every voice is heard, no matter if it speaks against domestic violence or any other abuse of power.

Finally, we return to us, the authors. The stories that opened this paper are not footnotes to a moment; they are the standard by which any reform should be judged. If #MeToo's early achievement was to make speaking possible, its legacy will be measured by whether speaking is no longer extraordinary. The work ahead is a culture—and a set of systems—where being believed, protected, and restored is not the exception but the norm.

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