

Raevin Bilyeu

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Final Project

Me Too.

Tarana Burke was working at a youth camp when she heard Heaven's story. Heaven was a young girl who found her way into trouble quite frequently, so when she told Burke that she wanted to speak to her privately, Burke feared she was about to confess something terrible, so she avoided Heaven. Finally, Heaven caught up to Burke and had a chance to speak. Heaven began to explain that her mother's boyfriend sexually abused her before Burke cut her off and sent her away. Burke felt completely helpless in this moment, so she began the Me Too movement which has become a prominent part of her non-profit organization Just Be Inc. Just Be Inc. is dedicated to giving resources to women of color for living successful and healthy lives. Me Too was again made popular in 2017 when Alyssa Milano tweeted it in the midst of the Harvey Weinstein accusations. The #MeToo was then widely spread across numerous social media platforms. On places such as Facebook more than 12 million posts and reactions were created within the first 24 hours (Garcia). The hashtag gained attention fast meanwhile Burke's version was pre-hashtag and didn't reach millions within the first 24 hours of its creation. Social media is not the only difference between the two versions of the movement.

Burke created her movement because women of color are not treated the same as white women when they report abuse. Burke wanted to give these helpless women resources and someone to stand up with them and say, "me too". Women of color are marginalized in so many ways and Burke wanted to bring intersectionality into the feminist/human rights movements. The

Me Too website explains the idea of “empowerment through empathy” and its centrality to the movement. The idea is that the more women who come forward the less alone these victims feel. There is power in numbers and the numbers were largely demonstrated through the use of the hashtag. This power, however, was taken from women of color and given to world when Alyssa Milano tweeted it. Burke’s intersectional ideas were no longer represented, and it became another tool for white feminism. Of course, all victims deserve a voice and resources, but the Me Too movement was created for those who experience oppression because of their skin color. It was supposed to be a voice for the voiceless and once it became a hashtag it lost its power for those who needed it most.

Currently, the movement is a mix between Burke’s intersectionality and the hashtag created by Alyssa Milano. A diverse group of women have participated in social media aspects of the movement, but many of them tweeted about the conflict they felt in participating the movement. This was especially prominent when Milano encouraged everyone to boycott twitter for a day. The #WomenBoycottTwitter started when actress Rose McGowan was locked out of her Twitter account for speaking against sexual violence in Hollywood. Many women supported the cause, but others were conflicted on whether to support their gender identity or their racial identity. Evidence can be seen in this tweet by Kimberly Bryant. Bryant expresses the struggle of many women of color in today’s society.

Women of color have been victims of the same injustices (Jemele Hill and Leslie Jones), but no one seems to care until a white woman is treated unfairly. The Me



Too movement was built on the idea of intersectionality and the social media version seems to

forget that. The difference makes the goals of the movement hard to decipher. At its core, the Me Too movement is about justice for victim of sexual abuse. The movement wants to raise awareness for sexual abuse and provide resources for victims. Besides these few commonalities, the goals of the two versions of the movement are not similar. Burke's version is for women of color and Milano's version is mainly ran by white women. Burke's is more face to face and speaking at rallies while Milano's is mostly on social media. The presence of the movement, however, today appears in both social media and rallies.

In the social media aspect people are encouraged to participate in the movement through using #MeToo. This gave many people a voice to speak on something they may have been scared to say before. The

number of participants provides power through empathy. As insignificant as a Tweet may seem, this movement



encouraged to speak about my experience with sexual assault for the first time. This Tweet was not only me participating in the movement, but it was also me finding my voice and using it to stand for others who are too scared to participate in the movement or those who do not have the opportunity. Others may have found empowerment through other mediums, but in this day and age social media is a way to define many people, and I wanted to be sure that my friends and followers got the whole definition of me. Others found voices within this hashtag as well and with the Women's March right around the corner many found power within marching with signs and shirts bearing the #MeToo. Women all around the country were partaking in the movement

with clever signs and drawing attention to the movement itself by displaying the hashtag. Those who may not know about the movement can search the hashtag online and find numerous articles about the movement and its objectives. The sign pictured here gives readers some idea of the



movement and what it stands for, but also leaves room for questions so viewers can research the movement further. Signs like these were amplified in the #Me Too Survivors March that took place in Hollywood in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein accusations.

This march was dedicated to movement and was led by Tarana Burke. At the front of the march Burke held a banner with the #MeToo in bright pink across the top. This is important because it shows her acceptance of new version of her original movement and that she is willing to adapt her campaign to newer standards in order to reach the masses. At this march she led chants such as:

Show me what a survivor looks like!

THIS IS WHAT A SURVIVOR LOOKS LIKE!

and

Stop the Violence!

Stop the Rape!

and

UNITED!

We'll never be divided!

These chants represent the movement and its goals. The last chant stands out the most because it is truly about empowerment through empathy. All of these people are uniting together to stand up for those who have been sexually abused and demonstrating that these survivors are not alone in the place where the hashtag began; Hollywood. However, Hollywood was not the only place where people took a stand.

The art world has also seen its fair share of sexual assault and many women have taken this movement as an opportunity to speak up. While many stories surfaced during this time, a lesser reported story highlights one artist finding power within the movement. Jaishri Abichandani is a intersectional feminists artist who experienced sexual harassment from a photographer, Raghubir Singh. “Singh had forced plane tickets and a hotel room on her, and as she didn’t have the funds to exit the situation, she had to remain with him for two weeks. She claimed that after the incident, the harassment continued for a year until his death in 1999” (Cheung). After this experience, just the sight of the promotion of his works triggered

Abichandani’s PTSD. Singh’s retrospective opened in at New York’s Met Breuer on October 11th and on December 3rd Abichandani organized a silent protest outside the museum.

The museum fully supported

Abichandani’s actions despite the fact

that the retrospective was displayed within its facilities. Abichandani’s protest reached a different demographic than those of celebrities and helped make this Me Too movement relevant in more than just the movie scene. The more diversity of communities that participate in the



movement the higher the chances of everyone seeing the movement and the message it brings. The media tends to focus on celebrities and that truly limits the exposure. Someone who has no interest in the movie industry may not see the movement, but may get exposure through another community, such as art. Abichandani is also a woman of color and helps promote intersectionality within the movement. Born in India, she is a strong role model for other Indian women because she demonstrates that you do not have to be white to be heard. Abichandani also partnered with the South Asian Women's Creative Collective for this protest; therefore, representing South Asian women as well. Abichandani's story personal story gives meaning and solidarity to Me Too that is essential for progression of the movement. These protests represent the victims and hopefully encouraged them to speak up because sexual assault is one of the most underreported violent crimes.

Victim blaming, false accusations, and under-age drinking, they all play a part in women not wanting to report their experiences with sexual assault. Many studies have been done on reporting sexual assault and multiple times it has been found that 16-20% of victims report their crime (Carbone-Lopez). That's roughly 1/5 of sexual assaults. Movements like Me Too are essential to increasing those numbers. The more women who tell their stories and together the more likely it is that other victims will feel safe to share their own stories. In a world where false accusation numbers are exaggerated, and the victims clothing choices are considered when judging a sexual assault case, it's no wonder victims are scared to speak up. If more people speak up like Abichandani, then eventually these myths will be treated as they are; irrelevant. As more people stand-up, slowly the negative connotations with victims will go away and people will realize it has nothing to do with dress and everything to do with the assaulter. Sexual assault is still a very taboo subject and the Me Too movement is slowly changing that, especially with the

#MeToo. But it's not only celebrities that need to speak it up, it's the everyday woman that many others can relate to on a deeper level.

Reshma Jagsi is a woman in the medical field who has dedicated some of her time to research and speak on the sexual assault in the medical field. When the Me Too movement gained momentum she was asked to speak about sexual assault in the medical field. Her interim assistant assumed Jagsi was going to tell a personal story and asked her about her story. Jagsi quickly corrected her because she wanted to be seen as an intellectual and didn't want to experience the victim blaming of today's society; "Having come of age in the era of Anita Hill's testimony against Clarence Thomas during his confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court, I know that women who report sexual harassment experience marginalization, retaliation, stigmatization, and worse. Even in the #MeToo era, reporting such behavior is far from straightforward" (Jagsi). After Jagsi had published her research on sexual misconduct, she received many letters from women in the medical field who had experiences of their own and none of them had reported it. Each story told by these women demonstrates the results of a male-dominated field and they encouraged Jagsi to tell her story. Although she did not mention her harasser, she saw the number of women who had the same experience as her and it empowered her to speak up. This is an excellent example of what the Me Too movement is trying to accomplish. Jagsi experienced empowerment through empathy. This journal describes her conflict between being seen as a victim or a scholarly source and ultimately she realizes she can be both and hopefully encourages other women in the medical field to follow in her footsteps and report their injustices. Although there have been multiple cases for the empowerment brought on by the movement, there is still a question on whether or not the new version achieves the goals of the older version.

The #MeToo movement excludes certain groups of people, promotes “trial by media”, and doesn’t take into account the ambiguities of masculinity. Because the newer version of the Me Too movement is mostly on social media, it excludes those who do not have access to social media and those who may experience a threatening environment for speaking out. Many of these women have the ability to speak out because they are white, rich and/or famous, or haven’t experienced sexual harassment at all. Social media is very public, and many women may not feel confident enough to admit their experiences to the entire world, especially if they are not white celebrities. These celebrities are receiving blind support before some of these men have even gone through a trial. Kathy Davis appreciates the victim support that has come with movement, but she remains wary because “it has also generated a ‘trial by media’ where individual men are publically ‘blamed and shamed’ for actions for which they often suffer severe consequences, and before having a chance to defend themselves” (Zarkov & Davis). Now as mentioned above, false accusations are almost never the case, but for those few cases #MeToo could ruin someone before they even have a chance to prove their innocence. All someone has to do is state an accusation on social media and instantly their entire following is on board, no questions asked. The movement must work together solid facts before publically branding someone for something they may or may not have done. #MeToo does not take into account the way societies teach young men and women what is feminine and what is masculine. There are so many expectations associated with gender that it sometimes creates grey areas and for a young man trying to find his way in the world there may be some confusion on what is acceptable or not. Kathy explains that, “The #MeToo phenomenon avoids thinking about ambiguities involved in doing masculinity (or, for that matter, doing femininity), especially in a globalizing world where men and women are confronted with different and sometimes confusing norms concerning gender and

sexual relations” (Zarkov & Davis). Men are taught to pursue women until they say yes and that the way a woman dresses expresses their openness to sex. Things like school dress codes suggest that if a woman bears her shoulders she can be a distraction to her male classmates and that if a woman wears a short skirt she is asking for sex. We yell at these men for harassing women, but we have not taught them what harassment is and how to avoid it. The Me Too movement highlights harassment and assault but does not offer education for young men trying to conform to masculinity expectations.

The future of the Me Too movement is rather ambiguous because of the stark contrast between the two versions. For this movement to take a step in the right direction there should be more focus on intersectionality and the importance of giving a voice to the voiceless. It should be less social media based so it's more accessible to everyone. The movement should also provide education for others on sexual assault/harassment and what it looks like. The movement has gained a lot of momentum and it should use it to educate the public and help stop sexual violence. Me Too can start to truly make a difference by working to get privileged assaulters prosecuted and ousted from their positions of power (ex. Trump). Once these two versions of the movement flow together harmoniously, then the true power of the movement will shine through. With more power comes more resources for the movement to help victims heal, to reach a bigger audience, and to help strengthen the movement. Overall, the next step of the movement is to start taking action against those who perpetrate sexual assault/harassment.

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