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Anything Besides “YES!” Means “NO!”

Alessia G. Rimicci

In 2006, writer and activist Tarana Jean Burke started the MeToo Movement, a grass-roots movement meant to help particularly Black women and young women of color who had been victims of sexual assault and rape. The movement’s mission is to help individual survivors through the healing process and “to disrupt the systems that allow for the global proliferation of sexual violence” (Me Too, 2006). Burke created a space to educate people about sexual violence that occurred specifically in the Black community.

Though successful in its own right, the movement did not pick up speed, globally, until 2017 when actress Alyssa Milano sent out a tweet calling for victims of sexual assault, sexual harassment, or rape to reply to her tweet using the hashtag #MeToo (Almasy, et al., 2020). Milano received an overwhelming amount of responses to her tweet, many of which were celebrity women like herself. Thus began the larger movement that is now sending Harvey Weinstein to meet his fate. In this essay, I will discuss the radical influence the #MeToo Movement has had in our society, specifically focusing on the Harvey Weinstein trial.

Weinstein is a disgraced movie producer who used his power and influence to coerce and manipulate women to meet with him privately and went on to commit acts of sexual violence against them. His sexual assault trial began on Tuesday, January 6, 2020, more than two years after more than eighty women publicly accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct back in 2017 when #MeToo took rise (Levenson et al., 2020). Though he has many sexual assault and rape allegations against him, this trial was for the violent sexual

crimes he committed against two women: Miriam Haleyi and Jessica Mann (Chavez et al., 2020). Weinstein was tried for five charges filed against him: rape in the first degree, rape in the third degree, criminal sexual act in the first degree, and two accounts of predatory sexual assault. Among his many victims are Annabella Sciorra, whose sexual abuse at the hands of Weinstein occurred in 1993, Dawn Dunning in 2004, Tarale Wulff in 2005, Miriam Haleyi in 2006, Lauren Young in 2012, Jessica Mann in 2013. He is now a convicted rapist, as he was found guilty of sexual assault in the first degree against Miriam Haleyi, as well as rape in the third degree against Jessica Mann (Polisi, 2020). He has been sentenced to 23 years in federal prison for his heinous crimes. Weinstein’s criminal cases are not over, though, as he faces charges of rape and sexual assault in Los Angeles for separate incidents (Almasy, et al., 2020).

Many celebrities have responded to this conviction by thanking the women who came forward to accuse Weinstein and the women who testified against him for their strength and courage (Almasy, et al., 2020). These women have been deemed the Silence Breakers for their bravery in holding their abuser accountable and calling for justice, not only

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for themselves, but for all survivors of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. Michelle Simpson Tuegel, an attorney who represents victims of sexual assault tells CNN, "They're [the victims] saying 'me too,' and it's so important for the jury to be able to hear about that and I think it's so relevant" (Levenson, 2020). This collective voice of over eighty women has radically altered society's understanding of what are and are not acceptable behaviors (Polisi, 2020). Sexual assault is the violent and deliberate abuse of another person's body. It disrupts the routines of everyday life as it has lifelong, detrimental consequences for the victims (Snow, et al., 1998).

Though the issue of sexual assault and rape has been present in our society for as long as time can tell, radical change did not occur until people began to understand it as a collective issue rather than an individual issue (Pullum, 2020). The movement itself is rooted in the understanding that sexual assault of any kind is not tolerable and, with the voices of many, our justice system will not turn a blind eye to sexual violence, regardless of the power, money, or influence these perpetrators may have. The main page of the official #MeToo Movement website displays the words "You are not alone" as the header. This is the cornerstone of the #MeToo movement.

One never fully recovers from the trauma

of being sexually assaulted or raped. It takes constant effort every day to unlearn the narratives perpetuated by society that a woman exists for the pleasure of a man and that if sexual assault should occur, it is the fault of the victim for putting themselves in that situation. We as a society have an obligation to our fellow humans to create a society that stands for justice and respect for others. We must hold people accountable for their actions. We have a responsibility to each other to not allow these crimes to go unpunished.

The issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape are ever prevalent in our society as made recently visible through the #MeToo Movement. Rape is not about obtaining pleasure from the act of sex; rapists rape because they seek power and control. If it were about deriving pleasure from sexual acts, there are many other ways to do so that do not harm another person. Being sexually assaulted is degrading, dehumanizing, and leaves people with lifelong trauma that affects the routines of everyday life. The Harvey Weinstein trial is one of many instances of positive changes in our society in which people do not get away with abuse of power, regardless of how much money and influence they have. The #MeToo Movement has been a revolutionary movement, uniting people against the common threat of sexual assault and calling for justice for all survivors of these heinous crimes.

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