



The #MeToo Movement

Peggy J. Parks





© 2020 ReferencePoint Press, Inc.
Printed in the United States

For more information, contact:

ReferencePoint Press, Inc.
PO Box 27779
San Diego, CA 92198
www.ReferencePointPress.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Parks, Peggy J., 1951– author.
Title: The #MeToo Movement/by Peggy J. Parks.
Description: San Diego, CA: ReferencePoint Press, Inc., 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Audience: Grades 10–12.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019035159 (print) | LCCN 2019035160 (ebook) | ISBN 9781682827611 (library binding) | ISBN 9781682827628 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Sexual abuse victims–Juvenile literature. | Sexual harassment–Juvenile literature. | Sex crimes—Prevention—Juvenile literature.
Classification: LCC HV6626 .P3654 2020 (print) | LCC HV6626 (ebook) | DDC 362.88/3—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019035159>
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019035160>



Contents

Introduction	4
Silent No More	
Chapter One	9
A Hashtag Sparks a Movement	
Chapter Two	20
Downfall of the Rich and Powerful	
Chapter Three	32
Women Make Political History	
Chapter Four	42
Unintended Consequences	
Chapter Five	53
More Work to Be Done	
Source Notes	64
For Further Research	70
Index	73
Picture Credits	79
About the Author	80

A Hashtag Sparks a Movement

People typically assume that the #MeToo movement began in 2017 in the aftermath of the Harvey Weinstein scandal. But the movement was actually founded more than a decade earlier. It was the brainchild of Tarana Burke, a civil rights activist and social justice advocate from New York City. In 2006, while living and working in Selma, Alabama, Burke and her colleagues became aware of a disturbing number of girls and women of color who had been victims of sexual abuse and violence. These females needed help and support, as well as a safe place to talk about what happened without being afraid or ashamed.

At the time, social media was relatively new, and the social networking platform MySpace was just becoming popular. To increase the visibility of her work with sexual abuse victims, and to offer a virtual platform where they could communicate and support each other, Burke started a MySpace page titled *Me Too*—and was astounded at the response. “There was no such thing as viral back then. But if there was this would be as close to that as possible,” says Burke.

Within like a week or so, we had so many responses from women who were like, “Thank you for doing this,” “This is really amazing,” “How can we be involved,” “We need help.” And we realized this is bigger than we thought.⁸

Burke had no way of knowing that the movement she started would eventually become a massive global platform for change.

The Famous Milano Tweet

The “me too” message was well known to Burke’s colleagues and people throughout the country who were familiar with her work. It was not widely known beyond those circles—until 2017, when the phrase “me too” was propelled into the spotlight by actress and activist Alyssa Milano. On October 15, 2017, Milano was angry and disgusted after reading articles about the many women who said Weinstein had sexually harassed or assaulted them. That night, while getting ready to go to bed, she received a text message from an acquaintance who attached a screen-

shot saying, “Suggested by a friend: if all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.”⁹

Milano had been sexually assaulted twice, once when she was a teenager, and she felt compelled to do as the screenshot suggested. She decided to tweet it to her followers. “I thought, you know what? This is an amazing way to

get some idea of the magnitude of how big this problem is. It was also a way to get the focus off these horrible men and to put the focus back on the victims and survivors.” To personalize the message, Milano added one sentence: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted, write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet,” and then she sent it. “That was basically it,” she says. “I looked down at my daughter, sent the tweet, and went to sleep not knowing it was going to snowball.”¹⁰

And snowball it did. The next morning, when Milano checked her Twitter feed, there were at least fifty-five thousand replies marked with “me too.” Most of the respondents had turned it into a hashtag, #MeToo, which quickly became the number one trending hashtag on Twitter—and it had spread far beyond the United States. In a 2018 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Pardis Mahdavi, who


“I looked down at my daughter, sent the tweet, and went to sleep not knowing it was going to snowball.”¹⁰

—Actress and activist Alyssa Milano, on her original “me too” tweet



is acting dean of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies in Denver, Colorado, writes, “#MeToo took hold in every corner of the world. By the end of the day [on October 16, 2017], there were similar movements in multiple languages, including Arabic, Farsi, French, Hindi, and Spanish. Today, women in eighty-five different countries are using the hashtag to bring attention to the violence and harassment they face in daily life and to demand change.”¹¹

Milano later said that the overwhelming response to her tweet did not really surprise her; she had long been convinced that sexual harassment was a massive problem. What she was not expecting, though, was a different kind of response—tweets from women of color who were familiar with Burke and her work. They made it clear that the “me too” message had been around for more than a decade and it was Burke who deserved credit for starting the movement. Burke was initially also concerned.



Tarana Burke is credited with starting the #MeToo movement in 2006 when she created a MySpace page titled “Me Too,” for victims of sexual abuse.

She had devoted her entire career to fighting sexual harassment and abuse among young black women. She was afraid that all her work would be buried under the avalanche of publicity that seemed focused on actresses and other famous white women. As Burke said in a 2018 interview: “I woke up to find out that the hashtag #metoo had gone viral and I didn’t see any of the work I laid out over the previous decade attached to it. I thought for sure I would be erased from a thing I worked so hard to build.”¹² As soon as Milano realized what had happened, she reached out to Burke by tweeting an apology. The two women began working together to promote the #MeToo movement.

A Heartbreaking Recollection

For years Tarana Burke has worked as an advocate for young women of color who have been sexually harassed or assaulted. But when she thinks about her first encounter with a young girl who turned to her for help, the memory is extremely painful. It occurred in the late 1990s, when Burke was working at a youth camp in Selma, Alabama. During a bonding session, several girls shared intimate stories about their lives. As she had done many times before, Burke listened to the girls and offered comfort as needed. The next day a thirteen-year-old girl named Heaven, who had been in the session, asked to speak with Burke privately. Burke writes:

For the next several minutes this child, Heaven, struggled to tell me about her “stepdaddy” or rather her mother’s boyfriend who was doing all sorts of monstrous things to her developing body. . . . I was horrified by her words, the emotions welling inside of me ran the gamut, and I listened until I literally could not take it anymore. . . . Right in the middle of her sharing her pain with me, I cut her off and immediately directed her to another female counselor who could “help her better.” I will never forget the look on her face. I will never forget the look because I think about her all of the time. . . . I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone and I couldn’t even bring myself to whisper . . . me too.

Tarana Burke, “The Inception,” JustBe Inc., 2013. <https://justbeinc.wixsite.com/justbeinc/the-me-too-movement-cmml>.

The Women Who Said “Me Too”

The responses to Milano’s “me too” tweet came from all kinds of people, including many celebrities. Superstar Lady Gaga, who had been open about her own trauma as a rape survivor, was among the first celebrities to tweet a response. A number of actresses also responded, including Gabrielle Union, Anna Paquin, Patricia Arquette, Viola Davis, Deborah Messing, Rosario Dawson, and Evan Rachel Wood. Singer/songwriter Kimya Dawson tweeted “me too,” as did comedian Lane Moore and former Fox News anchor Gretchen Carlson. Most women who tweeted #MeToo messages were not famous, however. As journalist Mary Pflum writes in an NBC News story, “Many women who were not household names also spoke out: nurses, teachers, engineers, florists, waitresses and students—mothers and daughters, sisters and wives.”¹³

“A stranger tweeted back to me to stay strong.”¹⁵

—Stephanie Angstadt, a seventeen-year-old girl who responded to the “me too” tweet



One young woman who responded was seventeen-year-old Stephanie Angstadt. When she saw Milano’s “me too” tweet, she was living in a group home in Mississippi and says she was feeling “very cut off from the world.”¹⁴ Angstadt had been placed in protective custody after reporting that her father had sexually abused her from the time she was fifteen. On October 15, 2017, while looking at her Twitter feed, she saw tweet after tweet after tweet from women who were responding to Milano with their own “me too” messages. Seeing so many others who had been sexually harassed or assaulted made Angstadt realize she was not alone, and it gave her the courage to tweet about her own trauma. Immediately, people replied with messages of support. “A stranger tweeted back to me to stay strong,”¹⁵ she says.

Nora Yolles Young, a hypnotherapist from Carrboro, North Carolina, also responded to Milano’s “me too” tweet. While Young was in her twenties, she was on an archaeological dig with a

Introduction: Silent No More

1. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Facts About Sexual Harassment.” www.eeoc.gov.
2. Quoted in Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2017. www.nytimes.com.
3. Quoted in Stephanie Zacharek et al., “The Silence Breakers,” *Time*, December 6, 2017. <https://time.com>.
4. Holly Kearl and Joseph Diebold, “New Study Shows High Prevalence of Sexual Harassment and Assault, and Much of the Public Believes Survivors,” UCSD Center on Gender Equity, April 30, 2019. www.stopstreetharassment.org.
5. Quoted in Brendan L. Smith, “What It Really Takes to Stop Sexual Harassment,” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, February 2018. www.apa.org.
6. Kristina Udice, “It’s Not Just Harvey Weinstein: Why Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Goes Unreported,” *FairyGodBoss*, 2018. <https://fairygodboss.com>.
7. Quoted in Jasmyn Belcher Morris and Emma Bowman, “Actress Ashley Judd’s #MeToo Moment Was Driven by a ‘Commitment’ to Her Younger Self,” NPR, March 2, 2018. www.npr.org.

Chapter One: A Hashtag Sparks a Movement

8. Quoted in Chris Snyder and Linette Lopez, “Tarana Burke on Why She Created the #MeToo Movement—and Where It’s Headed,” *Business Insider*, December 13, 2017. www.businessinsider.com.
9. Quoted in Nadja Sayej, “Alyssa Milano on the #MeToo Movement: ‘We’re Not Going to Stand for It Any More,’” *Guardian* (Manchester), December 1, 2017. www.theguardian.com.
10. Quoted in Sayej, “Alyssa Milano on the #MeToo Movement.”
11. Pardis Mahdavi, “How #MeToo Became a Global Movement,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 6, 2018. www.foreignaffairs.com.

For Further Research

Books

Gretchen Carlson, *Be Fierce*. New York: Center Street, 2017.

Jim DeRogatis, *Soulless: The Case Against R. Kelly*. New York: Abrams, 2020.

Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *#MeToo Movement*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2019.

Linda Hirshman, *Reckoning: The Epic Battle Against Sexual Abuse and Harassment*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

Heather C. Hudak, *#MeToo Movement*. New York: Crabtree, 2019.

Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement*. New York: Penguin, 2019.

Mirande Valbrune, *#MeToo: A Practical Guide to Navigating Today's Cultural Workplace Revolution*. Miami: Employee Relate, 2018.

Internet Sources

Nanette Asimov, “#MeToo Movement Spurs #HimToo Backlash: ‘People Don’t Want to Believe,’” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 13, 2018. www.sfchronicle.com.

Tarana Burke, “#MeToo Was Started for Black and Brown Women and Girls. They’re Still Being Ignored,” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2017. www.washingtonpost.com.

Alix Langone, “#MeToo and Time’s Up Founders Explain the Difference Between the 2 Movements—and How They’re Alike,” *Time*, March 22, 2018. <https://time.com>.

Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.

- academia and sexual harassment, 18
 - Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 21
 - Agarwal, Pragma, 45
 - age and sexual harassment, 17–19, 33
 - aggression and sexual harassment, 8
 - Ailes, Roger, 53
 - American Lawyer* (journal), 48
 - Amherst's Center for Employment Equity (University of Massachusetts), 7–8
 - Angstadt, Stephanie, 13
 - anxiety, 18
 - arbitration clauses, 55, 62
 - Argento, Asia, 20
 - armed forces, 57
 - Arquette, Patricia, 13
 - Atlantic* (magazine), 22

 - Barbara Lee Family Foundation, 32–33
 - Beckinsale, Kate, 20
 - Beeson, Katie Packer, 42–43
 - Bloomberg News, 49
 - Bloomfield, April, 29, 30

 - Blumenthal, Richard, 56, 58
 - Brown, Christia Spears, 18
 - Burke, Tarana, **11**
 - beginning of MeToo and, 9
 - on first encounter with young girl who turned to her for help, 12
 - focus on women of color and, 9, 11–12
 - Milano and, 12
 - as a *Time* Silence Breaker, 15

 - California, 59, 60–61
 - Capuano, Michael, 38
 - Carlson, Gretchen, **54**
 - educational program and legal resources initiative by, 54–55
 - Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Harassment Act and, 55
 - #MeToo and, 13, 53
 - on need for cultural change, 63
 - sexual harassment lawsuit by, 53
- celebrities
 - as accusers, 13, 15, 20
 - Carlson, 53
 - Judd, 4–5
 - Milano, 10