

TOPIC 2018

#metoo

The Me Too Movement

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In an environment like Hollywood that places such a high value on sex, the people who possess the most power treat it so casually. But then again, what else could be expected of a society that perpetuates the belief that sex sells?

Across the world, outraged women and men who refuse to allow their stories to be silenced any longer are speaking out following the #MeToo movement, a mass global movement sparked by a single hashtag. And, as to be expected of 21st century Western society, the prime focus of this movement seems to be Hollywood. But amidst the exposure of the grim reality of Hollywood's not-so-glamorous behind the scenes, many of us seem to be forgetting those who cannot tell their own stories, who need our attention the most.

October 15, 2017. It's been over a year since actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, encouraging women to share their stories of rape and sexual assault. Nearly a year since the downfall of once renowned and respected, now reviled and repudiated men in Hollywood such as Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey. Contrary to the popular belief that Milano began the #MeToo campaign, the movement's title was coined by social activist Tarana Burke in 2006, who launched MeToo as part of a campaign to promote "empowerment through empathy." In this past tumultuous year, one could say that the world has seen change. And in many ways, it has. But those who claim the entire world has

seen change clearly only see Hollywood. Because while there is more dialogue and conversation about sexual assault and gender-based violence now than ever before in Western culture, there is little to no change happening in developing nations. When we think of #MeToo stories, our minds leap to the words of the likes of Taylor Swift and Simone Biles. We do not think of 8-year-old Afisa Bano, an Indian girl who was kidnapped, repeatedly raped then bludgeoned to death in January. We do not think of the thousands of South East Asian children being exploited on live streams for "less than \$40 an hour" for Australian pedophiles. We do not think of Jyoti Singh, the Delhi woman who was beaten, gang raped and tortured to death on a bus in 2012. But the question is, why don't we think of these women? Why don't we place the same value on stories of women in non-Western civilisations as we do on stories of Western women? Perhaps it stems from a feeling of helplessness. We can blacklist and shun abusers from Hollywood with the publishing of a tweet, but we cannot easily bring justice for women who are being silenced not only by the beliefs of their countries but also by their parents, siblings and friends. It's easy to read a news article about the rape



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of a little girl in a country you have never been to and probably will never go to, and feel sickened for a few minutes before turning over the page and reading the next headline. But maybe it's time we consider that we're taking the easy way out.

While the cries of men and women in developing nations are being suppressed, laws here in Australia, supposedly one of the most privileged countries in the world, are silencing Australians. Australian law protects rapists and abusers through rigid defamation laws. These laws give abusers the power to sue their victims for defamation. As journalist Michael Cameron stated, "If it wasn't for journalists, Harvey Weinstein would still be producing films. But if the Weinstein story had come out in Australia he would be suing you and probably have a good chance of winning." These draconian laws have been described as the worst in the English-speaking world. In late October, New South Wales Labour party leader Luke Foley resigned following allegations from ABC journalist Ashley Raper of sexual assault at a Christmas party in 2016. While Foley has resigned, he continues to insist on his innocence despite the incident allegedly being witnessed by journalist Sean Nichols. When asked why she did not report the assault sooner, Raper's response cements the feeling that so many silenced women experience when they are abused by a person in a position of power; "It is clear to me that a woman who is the subject of

such behaviour is often the person who suffers once a complaint is made." Her fear of detrimental impacts on her career and family diminished her need to ask for help, and for two years she was silenced, much like every other person in Australia whom these defamation laws are silencing right now. As asserted by Jenna Price, "the defamation laws in Australia must be changed, otherwise the wealthy and the powerful will get away with murder".

Among the overlooked and silenced are male survivors. While #MeToo is an effective movement, it is also a highly gendered movement. Although it sparks many conversations about gender politics and assault surrounding women, the stories of male victims have been heavily repressed. In May, actress Asia Argento spoke at the 71st Cannes Film Festival and accused the now-disgraced Harvey Weinstein of rape, saying "in 1997, I was raped by Harvey Weinstein here at Cannes. I was 21 years old. This festival was his hunting ground." Despite Argento being one of the many prominent faces of the #MeToo movement, six months later, actor Jimmy Bennett accused Argento of sexually assaulting him in a hotel, during which Bennett was 17 and Argento was 37. Bennett had stated to CNN that he "hoped to handle it privately". Bennett's desire to deal with his assault under the shadows of secrecy contrasts with the women who, now more than ever, are publicly sharing the most private stories.

Because, the truth is, society does not allow men to be victims. Actor Terry Crews came forward in October 2018 and accused a Hollywood executive of groping him and claimed that he did not speak out sooner due to his fear that if he retaliated he'd be jailed, not only due to his gender but also his race. "'240 lbs. Black Man stomps out Hollywood Honcho' would be the headline the next day," he wrote on Twitter. Before a Senate Judiciary Committee for the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights, Crews denounced toxic masculinity, saying manhood "tends to be cultish and the complicit system encourages men to protect one another and shame those who speak out". It is this nature of toxic masculinity that leads some men to believe that they are entitled to women's bodies. The #MeToo movement began with the notion that we must believe the stories of women.

It is now time to believe the stories of all victims, because regardless of your stance on the matter, rape and toxic masculinity impacts all of us.

The #MeToo movement has become more than simply that; it is a tidal wave, a flash flood, a hurricane, opening the eyes of many and impacting all. It is a platform, a metaphorical microphone encouraging victims to speak up and share their stories. And above all, #MeToo is a lesson we can all learn from, whether we learn to tell the stories of those who cannot speak for themselves, to protest outdated laws or to believe all victims regardless of gender.

Allegra Welsh



When I first learned of the Global Scholars Essay Prize in Year 7, I was too young to enter, but I was immediately intrigued by the opportunity to write an essay on a global issue. I knew that when the time came and I was allowed to enter, I would write an essay on a topic I was truly passionate about. Human rights and raising awareness for rape and sexual assault are two things that are highly important to me and when I discovered that the 2018 topic was #MeToo, I knew what I would

write immediately. I am honoured to be receiving this prize and humbled by the opportunity to write about something I am so passionate about.

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