



Océane Desmartin

## **#MeToo : revolution or blip and backlash ? An assessment at the 18-month mark**

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**#METOO: REVOLUTION OR BLIP  
AND BACKLASH? AN  
ASSESSMENT AT THE 18-  
MONTH MARK**

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**WRITTEN BY OCÉANE DESMARTIN**

**Supervised by C. Jon Delogu**

**Master 2 Recherche - Études Anglophones**

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# ABSTRACT

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Feminism has been an important issue once again over the last eighteen months. This new discussion started in October 2017 when the New York Times published an article revealing the abuse of power and sexual harassment that Harvey Weinstein exerted on more than eighty women. This revived or triggered feminist movements across the world. In the United States, which will be the main focus of this research paper, #MeToo went viral in response to this scandal. It is thus important to study the consequences of #MeToo in the United States as well as on a global level, eighteen months after it took off.

Many articles have been written on the subject of #MeToo, seeking to explain its aims and its impacts on various societies. A lot of them describe #MeToo as a revolution which, if true, definitely places us in a brand new “wave” of feminism. This study will try to determine whether these claims are true. The guiding question will be to ask whether #MeToo marks a revolutionary turning point in feminism or is instead a phenomenon with limited consequences on a local scale.

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# INTRODUCTION

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“I have always believed that women are not victims, we are agents of change, we are drivers of progress, we are markers of peace — all we need is a fighting chance.”<sup>1</sup> These inspiring words by Hillary Clinton have taken on significance over the past few years, as feminism has acquired greater importance in Western as well as Eastern societies, shaping the current and future ways of life of populations across the world.

This memoir will focus on feminism in the United States, more precisely on a recent movement that strengthened the will for women’s rights and made women’s voices louder and more influential: the #MeToo movement that started in October 2017 and still resonates today in 2019. As it is a rather recent movement, few books and little research have been published, hence the necessity to fill that gap today.

Feminism is a subject that I have always been interested in. The main reason for this strong interest is simply because I am a woman. And as a woman, like every woman I know, I have had to face sexism. However I also consider myself “lucky” because I have never been seriously assaulted. But there are other ways for some men to express sexism: clichés, sexual harassment in public spaces and domination of various kinds. Fighting for one’s dignity and equal rights is something important as is overcoming sexism in a lasting way. I also think it is unacceptable that in 2019 women are still persecuted, discriminated against, or paid less because of their gender. Feminism will thus always be an important subject to write on, so long as equality is not achieved, which it is not, and not even considered by all to be a worthwhile goal as the #MeToo movement has glaringly revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote by Hillary Clinton, at the 2013 Women in the World Summit, April 5, 2013

As a key concept in this research paper, feminism has to be defined properly. *The Oxford Dictionary* defines it as “the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.”<sup>2</sup> The *Cambridge Dictionary* gives the following definition: “The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.”<sup>3</sup> Another key concept to define is the #MeToo movement. This movement, that was born on social media in October 2017, can be defined as “a cultural movement that seeks to expose and eradicate predatory sexual behavior.”<sup>4</sup> These two important notions may be linked together, as #MeToo is one of the biggest symbols and battlegrounds of today’s feminism. Indeed, this movement has taken on so much importance during the last few years that it cannot be left aside when talking about feminism in the twenty-first century.

This memoir is going to ask and explore whether #MeToo really *is* the revolution it is said to be, or whether it is more properly seen, appearances notwithstanding, as a tokenist backlash against feminism of limited impact and that will ultimately not have had much effect on the condition of women and the expansion of their rights.

To answer this question, we have to focus on recent events that made the news on television or in newspapers as well as on social media where people are able to express their opinions about these events. The research on #MeToo was thus made by reading articles mainly in American newspapers, but also in European ones, to see whether the point of view on the movement changed in other countries. A good part of the research was also made by reading testimonies on social networks like Twitter, or by listening to feminist speeches.

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford Dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/feminism>

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/feminism>

<sup>4</sup> Collins Dictionary, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/me-too>

Documentaries, Hollywood films and series have also proven to be good sources of information.

As this memoir will deal with the social consequences that #MeToo has, we will have to describe the background that helped its rise. We will thus start by explaining the state of feminism before #MeToo. Then, we will deal with how #MeToo started to trend and why it is seen by some as a revolution. Finally, the third part will deal with the present and likely future impact of #MeToo both in America and the world.

## 1) Women Before #MeToo

### 1.1 Feminist Waves

The history of feminism has been a long and eventful one. The #MeToo movement is the result of a long fight for women's rights and equal treatment alongside men. This fight has gone on for centuries. In the United States, or in the Western World in general, its history is customarily divided into "waves." The first wave is often said to have officially started in 1848, with the Seneca Falls Convention,<sup>5</sup> which consisted in rewriting the Declaration of Independence to include women: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men **and women** are created equal..."<sup>6</sup> The Convention triggered many marches, protests and lectures aimed to give women the right to vote, a right that was then only given to men. Ideas about birth control also started to emerge, but the main demand was suffrage. First Wave Feminism witnessed the emergence of feminist icons such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who founded the National Women's Suffrage Association together. This association's aim was to reach equality in the political sphere, by giving women the right to vote.<sup>7</sup> According to many historians, such as Suzanne M. Marilley, the founders of the associations

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<sup>5</sup> Constance Grady. "The Waves of Feminism, and Why People Keep Fighting over them, Explained." *Vox*, 20 Jul. 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton. "The Declaration of Sentiments", *Fordham University*, 1848, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/senecafalls.asp>

<sup>7</sup> "National Woman Suffrage Association", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15 Jul. 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Woman-Suffrage-Association>

and other members of feminist movements were against the right to vote for African American men if it was not also given to women.<sup>8</sup>

What really brought women's suffrage to national attention was the arrest of Susan B. Anthony in 1872, for having tried to vote in the reelection of President Ulysses S. Grant. This event attracted more people to the movement, and led to the merging of the National Woman's Suffrage Association with its rival, the American Woman's Suffrage Association. It led to the passing of the 19th Amendment which finally allowed women to vote in 1920. Although it was a big victory for feminists, it was not as positive as it looked like for all women. However the first women's movement was not perfect, as it still made a difference between white and black women who felt excluded from the women's movement. Black women did not feel accepted in the fight for the vote because of the racism of some of its founders, such as Elizabeth Stanton, who described Blacks as rapists.<sup>9</sup> This black women's feeling of exclusion from the women's movement is still noticeable today, as some of them thought the Women's Marches or #MeToo was focusing too much on white women's needs.<sup>10</sup>

Second Wave Feminism started in 1963 with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. In this now classic study, Friedan defines "the problem that has no name,"<sup>11</sup> the widespread unhappiness felt by housewives in their single role of mothers, and the general sexism that would blame (whining, ungrateful) women for their own unhappiness in the 1950s and the 1960s. As journalist Constance Grady argues in an article on *Vox*, this

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<sup>8</sup> Suzanne M. Marilley. *Women Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, 76

<sup>9</sup> Brent Staples. "Opinion: How the Suffrage Movement Betrayed Black Women", *The New York Times*, 28 July 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/opinion/sunday/suffrage-movement-racism-black-women.html>

<sup>10</sup> Anna North. "How the Women's March Made Itself Indispensable", *Vox*, 19 January 2018 <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/1/19/16905884/2018-womens-march-anniversary>

<sup>11</sup> Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, 5th Edition, New York: Norton, 2001, Ebook, 44

book was revolutionary in its contents as well as in its reach. Its revolutionary aspect also relies on its success: having sold 3 million copies, the book was read mostly by (white) housewives who discussed it with friends thus helping the rise of the second wave of American feminism.

This second wave is remembered for being the era of a fight for workplace equality and sexual liberty. One of the major claims by feminists at the time was the right to decide whether to have a child or not. This claim can be found in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*:

“When motherhood, a fulfillment held sacred down the ages, is defined as a total way of life, must women themselves deny the world and the future open to them? Or does the denial of that world *force* them to make motherhood a total way of life?”<sup>12</sup>

This quote sums up the dilemma felt by many women living in this period: boldly having a career or accepting to become a mother, as was the norm imposed by the patriarchal society. The 1960s and the 1970s thus correspond to the period in which reproductive rights progressed the most. The 1965 *Griswold v Connecticut* decision allowed married couples to use birth control. This right was extended to all American citizens in 1972 thanks to the *Baird v. Eisenstadt* decision. But the best-known Supreme Court decision that improved women's reproductive rights is *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that decriminalized abortion. This decision did not please everyone, however, and it is still contested in all regions of the country by conservatives who seek to restrict or outright ban abortion.

Third-Wave Feminism started in 1991 with the Anita Hill case. Very similar to the Kavanaugh scandal that took place last year in 2018, the Anita Hill challenge to the Supreme

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<sup>12</sup> Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, 84

Court nomination of Justice Clarence Thomas paved the way for a new kind of feminism that encouraged women to come forward to denounce sexual harassment. Anita Hill, a young American attorney, decided to testify before the U.S Senate to denounce the workplace misbehavior of her boss at the time, Clarence Thomas, who was nominated to the U.S Supreme Court. Despite the support of many Americans who believed Anita Hill, and the accusations held against him, Clarence Thomas was confirmed to the Supreme Court.<sup>13</sup>

Sexual harassment in the workplace became an important issue in the American society. According to Meryl Streep in the third part of a documentary called “Makers, Women Who Make America,” the issue of sexual harassment even became a “household phrase.”<sup>14</sup> Gender equality in general also became a national issue, as people started to notice the under-representation of women in high offices. The year following the Anita Hill case was thus nicknamed The Year of the Woman. 1992 was marked by a record number of seats won by women both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives: 24 women won seats in the House of Representatives, and 27 became new Senators.<sup>15</sup> Even though these numbers were unprecedented, the inequalities between men and women were still large. As for the event that launched the Third Feminist wave, the Anita Hill case, it looks like its impact was limited, as the same result occurred 27 years later in the Kavanaugh case, when although accused of attempted rape, Kavanaugh was still confirmed to the U.S Supreme Court.

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<sup>13</sup> Tikkanen, Amy. “Anita Hill | Biography & Facts | Britannica.Com.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12 Apr. 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anita-Hill>.

<sup>14</sup> Dyllan McGee. “Makers: Women Who Make America, Part 1: The Awakening.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Kristin Casas, 5 March 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkFv1Y\\_IKa0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkFv1Y_IKa0)

<sup>15</sup> “Year of the Woman, 1992 | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives.” *History, Art & Archives*, 2007, <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/Assembling-Amplifying-Ascending/Women-Decade/>.



Today, most people claim there is a fourth wave of feminism unfolding now, in the Internet age. The omnipresence of social media in the lives of Western populations helped boost the rise of a new kind of feminism, which made it much easier to denounce everyday sexism, and to debate feminism. According to a 2013 article written by journalist Kira Cochrane in *The Guardian*, fourth wave feminism is “defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online.”<sup>16</sup> Even though this article was written in 2013 and already talking of fourth wave feminism, the peaks of this wave did not occur before Donald Trump’s election in November 2016 or the #MeToo movement in October 2017. It is likely that #MeToo would not have had the same impact without social media. We can even wonder if it could have existed at all, as it was created and mostly spread on Twitter.

## **1.2. The Condition of Women in America Before #MeToo**

### **1.2.1. Women in the Workplace**

After considering the various women’s movements and their fights for equality and freedom, one ought to think about the reasons why these fights were needed. One of the first that comes to mind is the condition of women in the workplace near the middle of the twentieth century. It is common knowledge that it took a long time for women to be allowed in the public workforce, (i.e., outside the home or farm), since public space was viewed as being reserved for men. Women, educated or not, had to stay at home and it was very difficult for them to pursue public careers except as teachers or nurses. The Youtube documentary

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<sup>16</sup> Kira Cochrane. “The Fourth Wave Of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women.” *The Guardian*, 10 Dec 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women>

“*Makers: Women Who Make America*” in its first part “The Awakening,” gives a history of feminist activism to get more equality for women in the workplace. It makes a link between the increase of women in the workforce and the fact that their jobs were “low-paid and dead-end” (8:14).<sup>17</sup> The few women who were working were employed as secretaries and most black women were maids for rich white families, which shows how unequal the salaries and ways of life were between white and black women. (*Makers*, Part 1). Other jobs were opened to women – yet they were dominated by sexism. The symbol of jobs where women were discriminated against is the airline field. According to testimonies by former flight attendant Jean Montague in the *Makers* documentary, the women applying for air hostess jobs had to show their legs in interviews. Television records from the time list the condition for women to be hired: “she must be single, between the ages of 21 and 28, she must be between 5,2 and 5,6 inches in height, and of normal weight.” (*Makers*, Part 1) In the same documentary, Jean Montague also explains that air hostesses were fired when they turned 32. Here, she quotes her boss: “At 32 years old, I was too old to be out in public anymore. You should be home and married and having children, you shouldn’t be on the airplane. Leave that up for the young pretty girls.” (Montague, *Makers*) Sexism in the workplace was also expressed through sexual harassment. Though sexual harassment at work was prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under the Title VII amendment, it has been going on for decades. In *Sexual Harassment and Title VII - A Better Solution*, author Michelle Ridgeway Peirce argues that Title VII has not always been effective.<sup>18</sup> She gives the example of the *Corne v. Bausch & Lomb Inc* case in 1975, in which a woman lost her case because the court did not consider what she endured as

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<sup>17</sup> Dyllan McGee. “*Makers: Women Who Make America: Part One.*” 2013

<sup>18</sup> Michelle R. Peirce. *Sexual Harassment and Title VII -- A Better Solution*, 30 B.C.L. Rev. 1071 (1989), <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1897&context=bclr>

sexual harassment but as an individual act by her supervisor “to satisfy a personal urge” (Peirce, 1080). A motion to dismiss was granted to the defense, and the victim’s accusation was rejected.<sup>19</sup> Another example of sexual harassment at work is given in the *Makers* documentary: that of Barbara Burns, who used to be a coal miner for the Smoot Coal Incorporation, led by Paul Feisenbaker. In 1984, she filed a complaint for sexual harassment against her boss, who, she said, used to consider women workers as “servants” whom he could kiss whenever he wanted to.<sup>20</sup> After refusing a settlement proposed by her boss’s lawyers, she won her suit, marking “one of the first early significant victories in the history of sexual harassment law.”<sup>21</sup> Today, women are still sexually harassed at work, sexual harassment being one of the main grievances of the #MeToo movement.

### **1.2.2. Women in Popular Culture**

The condition of women in America, as well as the wish for its improvement, have been well represented in American popular culture. For decades, feminism has tried to attain more equality in Hollywood, with the creation of strong female characters in both movies and television series. While being more and more denounced in the society of the 1970s, sexual harassment was also the subject matter of some movies at the time. The best example of a movie tackling that delicate issue is *Nine To Five*, that was released in 1980. This movie is about three working women (portrayed by Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin, and Jane Fonda) who are sexually harassed by their boss, and who decide to take revenge against him. Rated 82%

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<sup>19</sup> “Corne v. Bausch and Lomb, Inc., 390 F. Supp. 161 (D. Ariz. 1975)”. *Justia Law*, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/390/161/1966370/>.

<sup>20</sup> McGee, Dylan. “Makers: Women Who Make America (Part 3).” *Youtube*, 5 Mar. 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkFv1Y\\_lKa0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkFv1Y_lKa0).

<sup>21</sup> Meryl Streep, narrator. “Makers: Women Who Make America, Part 3.”

on Rotten Tomatoes,<sup>22</sup> this movie is said to be “a fascinating time capsule of the wage slavery and sexism of its time.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, its denunciation of sexual harassment in the workplace made it a progressive comedy that is still remembered today. Other movies released before the turn of the twenty-first century such as *Alien* (1979) or *Thelma and Louise* (1991) or after 2000 like *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), *The Hunger Games* (2012) or *Wonder Woman* (2017) all have something in common: they all feature strong leading female characters challenging sexist stereotypes. To what extent does it make these movies *feminist* movies? Because for decades, independent women have been highly underrepresented in Hollywood. An extra 2014 episode of the documentary “*Makers*” entitled “Women in Hollywood” argues that the role of women started to “decline” at the moment when the profitability of Hollywood began to emerge in the 1920s, meaning that all the main studios and institutions would soon be run by men.<sup>24</sup> The roles of women in movies thus became very stereotypical: either docile housewives or libertine *femmes fatales*. According to Hollywood star Jane Fonda, actresses were only judged based on their looks, never on their talent, and women had no say over the scripts (Makers: Women in Hollywood). Thanks to second wave feminism, women started to emerge before and behind the camera. The Makers documentary shows an example of the rise of a woman to the highest ranks of the movie industry. Sherry Lansing became president of the Twentieth Century Fox studio. This professional rise opened the door for many women in an industry almost totally run by men. The increase of feminist

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<sup>22</sup> *9 to 5* (1980). [www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com), [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/9\\_to\\_5](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/9_to_5).

<sup>23</sup> Peter Bradshaw. “9 to 5 Review – Dolly Parton’s Quietly Radical Office Revenge Satire”. *The Guardian*, 15 November 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/nov/15/9-to-5-review-dolly-parton>.

<sup>24</sup> Rory Kennedy, Linda Goldstein Knowlton. “Makers: Women in America”, *Makers*, Narrated by Julia Roberts, 7 October 2014, <https://www.makers.com/videos/554ff7f0e4b08081476eaa06>

works in Hollywood did not only occur on the big screen, it also happened on television, with the increase of popularity of television series. One of the first series to represent a progressive view was a 1966 sitcom called *That Girl*. It was revolutionary at the time because it was the first sitcom to ever deal with a working independent woman who does not need to be married and at home to be happy. Its other revolutionary aspect comes from the fact that its main actress, Marlo Thomas, had her say on what was supposed to happen in the storyline. (Marlo Thomas, *Makers: Women in Hollywood*.) African-American women could also start to enjoy this new kind of feminism, and lead their own series outside stereotypical roles. Actress Diahann Carroll became the leading actress of sitcom *Julia*, that aired on NBC from 1968 to 1971. Even though it was controversial at the time, because it was said to be unrealistic and too far away from the real way of life of most African American families,<sup>25</sup> the show was a success and helped black women to get on the national stage provided by television. In general, the representation of women in television series has been increasing ever since then, and women's roles evolved as well. They became more liberated. The symbol of women's liberation in television series is *Sex and the City*, that ran for six seasons from 1998 to 2004. It was one of the first times that female characters had been able to freely enjoy their sexuality and talk about it without being judged by fathers or husbands. Other series expressed their feminism in other ways, by fighting the stereotypes of women characters: the best example of that is *Desperate Housewives*, broadcasted by ABC from 2004 to 2012. It challenges the stereotypes through the storylines of characters such as Lynette, a former working woman who feels unhappy raising her four children at home, or Bree, the perfect housewife who ends up running her own cooking company. Many years ago, as well as in the early 2010s, some

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<sup>25</sup> George, Alice. "Was the 1968 TV Show 'Julia' a Milestone or a Millstone for Diversity?" *Smithsonian*, 6 September 2018 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/was-1968-tv-show-julia-milestone-or-millstone-180970198/>.

television series producers decided to give more power to women on screen than what was achieved in reality, in the United States. More and more series started to portray women working in the highest levels of society, even of government. Female politicians have been more and more represented in political series such as *Veep* or *Scandal*. The latter was created by Shonda Rhimes, who is reputed for having created very successful series with strong female leads, such as *Grey's Anatomy* or *How To Get Away With Murder*, which are still running today.

### **1.2.3. Reproductive Rights**

In addition to women's place at work and their representation in Hollywood, one of the main feminist issues has been the fight for reproductive rights. Reproductive rights are defined as rights that:

“... rest on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.”<sup>26</sup>

Though reproductive rights are considered as human rights according to this definition by the United Nations, this part will focus on the United States where great achievements considering reproductive rights were made but also continue to be challenged. When thinking

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<sup>26</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *Reproductive Rights are Human Rights: A Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions*. Published jointly with UNFPA and the Danish Institute for Human Rights , 2014, 19 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/NHRIHandbook.pdf>

about reproductive rights, one of the first things that comes to mind is the right to abortion. As previously mentioned on page 7, abortion became legal thanks to *Roe v. Wade*, a decision taken in 1973 by the Supreme Court. Seven Supreme Court justices voted in favor of legalizing abortion, against 2 who voted no.<sup>27</sup> *Roe v. Wade* originated from the circumstances of Norma McCorvey, also known as Jane Roe, a woman from Texas who was pregnant and wanted to end her pregnancy after having given two previous children to adoption. Her fight was not only for herself, but for all the women who could not afford safe and legal abortion like her. Jane Roe eventually won her case, on the advocacy for the right to privacy, provided by the Constitution thanks to the 14th Amendment ([history.com](https://www.history.com)). *Roe v. Wade* thus became a symbol of liberation for women, as abortion was considered as a criminal act before it became legal. Author Sheila Tobias, who fought for women's access to higher education with activist Gloria Steinem, talks about abortion in the second part of the *Makers* feminist documentary. "It was criminal. Everybody was criminal, the doctor who had performed it, the woman who had an abortion, she was criminal, never the men who had gotten her pregnant. It was a criminal act, and a shameful act."<sup>28</sup> Though *Roe v. Wade* was a turning point in the history of reproductive rights in the United States, it could not have happened without earlier discussions on abortion. In 1972, prominent women such as Gloria Steinem, Billie Jean King and Susan Sontag made the headlines by signing a petition entitled "We had abortions." Its aim was to come forward and reveal what had happened to them and to open further discussion about abortion, to strengthen its legalization (*Makers*, Part 2).

Many women were happy with the outcome of *Roe v. Wade*, but others were not. It became a serious political issue, as conservative men and women were more likely to be

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<sup>27</sup> [history.com](https://www.history.com) Editors. "ROE V. WADE", *history.com*, A&E Television Networks, 27 March 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-rights/roe-v-wade>

<sup>28</sup> "Makers: Women Who Make America, Part 2, 2013

against abortion than their liberal counterparts (Makers, Part 2, 46:50). Political backlash towards abortion in the aftermath of the legalization of abortion can be explained by the election of an openly “pro-life” president, Ronald Reagan, who stated several times that he was against abortion. For example, at the 1980 Presidential debate against candidate John Bayard Anderson, he said: “With regard to the freedom of the individual for choice with regard to abortion, there’s one individual who’s not considered at all. That’s the one who is being aborted.”<sup>29</sup> These negative views on abortion thus grew within the conservative part of the American population at the same time as the number of legal abortions performed increased. Anti abortion riots resulting in violence increased in the three decades following *Roe v. Wade*. According to CNN, more than 300 acts of violence were perpetrated against abortion providers between 1973 and 2003.<sup>30</sup> The most frequent acts of violence against abortion providers, and more generally Planned Parenthood clinics were arson and bombings. According to former Planned Parenthood president Faye Wattleton, “Reproductive rights were not settled, and there was a great deal of contention about all aspects of reproductive rights.” (Makers, 48:55). Though abortion is the symbol of the fight for reproductive rights, it is not the only one. Birth control has also proven to be a great achievement in the fight for women’s rights to chose whether or when to have a child. Funded by the prominent organization Planned Parenthood, research to create the contraceptive pill started in 1948, but the American Food and Drug Administration only approved its sale in 1960.<sup>31</sup> As it was not

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<sup>29</sup> Ronald Reagan. “Ronald Reagan and John Anderson Debate , September 21, 1980”, *Youtube*, uploaded by Reagan Library, 21 Jun, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxf8Exdie1w>

<sup>30</sup> Kimberly Hutchinson. “A Brief History of Anti-Abortion Violence”, *CNN*, 1 December 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/30/us/anti-abortion-violence/index.html>

<sup>31</sup> See the Planned Parenthood website: <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are/our-history>



available in all the states, some local activists started to campaign for its nationwide legalization. The most effective campaign was the one led by Estelle Griswold in Connecticut. After the authorities shut down a clinic she had just opened to help women get contraceptive pills, her case was taken to the Supreme Court in 1965. Seven members voted in favor of the national legalization of the pill against two who did not agree, the same result as *Roe v Wade*, that would take place eight years later.<sup>32</sup> And similarly to *Roe v. Wade*, the result of *Griswold v. Connecticut* was based on “the individual’s right to privacy” (Finlay). According to studies led by the Guttmacher Institute and Planned Parenthood, the use of birth control in general has had a good impact on women and their families, such as a drastic fall of mother and child mortality, and a better social advancement for women, who can get a college degree more easily, decide when to have a child or how many children they want.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy Finlay. “Taking on the State: Griswold v. Connecticut, *Connecticut History*, circa 2017, <https://connecticuthistory.org/taking-on-the-state-griswold-v-connecticut/>

<sup>33</sup> *Contraceptive Use in the United States*, Guttmacher Institute, July 2018, <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/contraceptive-use-united-states>

### **1.3: Politics: Donald Trump’s Election: One of the Events that Triggered the #MeToo Movement**

#### **1.3.1: Denunciation of Sexism and Misogyny: the Scandal of the “Locker-room Talk”**

“Tomorrow I will walk out of my house knowing that 1/2 the country gave their implicit approval of sexual assault today.”<sup>34</sup> “Okay. Trying to think of what to tell my daughters when they wake up tomorrow. If there is a tomorrow lol.”<sup>35</sup> “I’m disgusted and disappointed in this country. Being a racist, sexist homophobic pig is more acceptable than being a woman.”<sup>36</sup> These reactions from American citizens listed in an article in the magazine *Cosmopolitan*<sup>37</sup> reveal the disgust and fear of people who did not vote for Donald Trump, and who were shocked by his very low opinion of women and ethnic or religious minorities. Our claim is that the degrading things Trump said about women fueled the need for more respect

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<sup>34</sup> @RVAwonk. “Tomorrow I will walk out of my house knowing that 1/2 the country gave their implicit approval of sexual assault today. #ElectionNight” *Twitter*, 9 November, 2016, [https://twitter.com/RVAwonk/status/796176610139471872?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E796176610139471872&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fpolitics%2Fa8261751%2Fheartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets%2F](https://twitter.com/RVAwonk/status/796176610139471872?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E796176610139471872&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fpolitics%2Fa8261751%2Fheartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets%2F)

<sup>35</sup> @nicole\_soojung. "Okay. Trying to think of what to tell my daughters when they wake up tomorrow. If there is a tomorrow lol" *Twitter*, 9 November 2016, [https://twitter.com/nicole\\_soojung/status/796220466629373952?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E796220466629373952&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fpolitics%2Fa8261751%2Fheartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets%2F](https://twitter.com/nicole_soojung/status/796220466629373952?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E796220466629373952&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fpolitics%2Fa8261751%2Fheartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets%2F)

<sup>36</sup> @lexnicole95. “Being a racist, sexist homophobic pig is more acceptable than being a woman #ElectionNight”, *Twitter*, 9 November 2016, [https://twitter.com/lexnicole95/status/796255261635866624?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E796255261635866624&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fpolitics%2Fa8261751%2Fheartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets%2F](https://twitter.com/lexnicole95/status/796255261635866624?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E796255261635866624&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fpolitics%2Fa8261751%2Fheartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets%2F)

<sup>37</sup> Gina Mei. “33 Heartbreaking Reactions to the Results of the 2016 Presidential Election”, *Cosmopolitan*, 9 November 2016, <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/a8261751/heartbreaking-reactions-2016-election-results-tweets/>

towards women, and it accelerated (perhaps even catalyzed) the #MeToo movement. One cannot analyze all the sexist remarks uttered by the current president as there are too many. The most shocking ones will thus be our focus. The best example concerns Trump's use of what he called "locker-room talk."<sup>38</sup> This phrase was used by the candidate Trump during the second presidential debate against Hillary Clinton, two days after the scandal broke out. On October 7, 2016, an Access Hollywood tape recorded in 2005 was released, revealing Trump's opinion about women to the world: "Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything."<sup>39</sup> These words reflect the deep sexism that came to sum up the president's personality and thoughts. As soon as it was released, the tape provoked an intense shock not only in the United States but all around the world. In America, the reactions were numerous, on television as well as on social media. Many reactions were political, such as that of Hillary Clinton herself: "This is horrific. We cannot allow this man to become president."<sup>40</sup> Like her, many opponents of Donald Trump denounced these lewd comments about women. But Democrats were not the only ones to blame the presidential candidate: some Republican political figures decided to oppose their candidate. Some Republican senators in office at the time even called for Trump

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Trump."Second Presidential Debate, Election 2016, The New York Times", *Youtube*, uploaded by The New York Times, 9 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfq0Yw2sMq0>

<sup>39</sup> David Fahrenthold. "Trump Recorded Having Extremely Lewd Conversation About Women in 2005, *The Washington Post*, 8 October 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-about-women-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f6349a5bff9e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-about-women-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4_story.html?utm_term=.f6349a5bff9e)

<sup>40</sup> @HillaryClinton. "This is horrific, we cannot allow this man to be president", *Twitter*, 7 Oct, 2016, <https://twitter.com/hillaryclinton/status/784497331647422464>

to step out and leave the candidacy to his running mate Mike Pence.<sup>41</sup> Examples include Illinois Senator Mark Kirk, and Colorado Senator Cory Gardner, among others (Wellford). Though many Republicans kept endorsing Trump after the scandal, what is common in everyone's responses is the extreme harshness and sexism in words that should never be uttered by a presidential candidate or by anyone else (Wellford). These Republican responses have been criticized for their hypocrisy in left-leaning media outlets such as *CNN*. According to an article written by Princeton University Professor Julian Zelizer, "all of the Republican rhetoric over the past 24 hours seems a bit hypocritical to those have been following the campaign."<sup>42</sup> To support his point, Zelizer claims that Trump had uttered many other sexist remarks that Republican politicians never seemed to mind about before (Zelizer). Politicians were not the only ones to react to this scandal on social media; actors, singers, and other personalities also shared their disgust towards the Republican nominee. One of the most memorable reactions was that of writer Kelly Oxford, the day after the release of the *Access Hollywood* tape: "Women: tweet me your first assaults. They aren't just stats. I'll go first: Old man on city bus grabs my "pussy" and smiles at me, I'm 12."<sup>43</sup> This tweet, that was liked by 18 187 people, shared by 12 373 people and has more than 14 000 replies (Twitter) encouraged women to come forward and denounce their sexual assaulters. One year before #MeToo, this similarly motivated though less famous movement was one of the first attempts

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<sup>41</sup> Rachel Wellford. "Here's the List of GOP Responses to Trump's Vulgar Comments about Groping Women." *PBS NewsHour*, 7 Oct. 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/headline-republicans-react-trump-comments-objectifying-women>.

<sup>42</sup> Julian Zelizer. "We're Shocked: Donald Trump Is a Sexist." *CNN*, 10 October 2016 <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/08/opinions/were-shocked-trump-is-a-sexist-opinion-zelizer/index.html>.

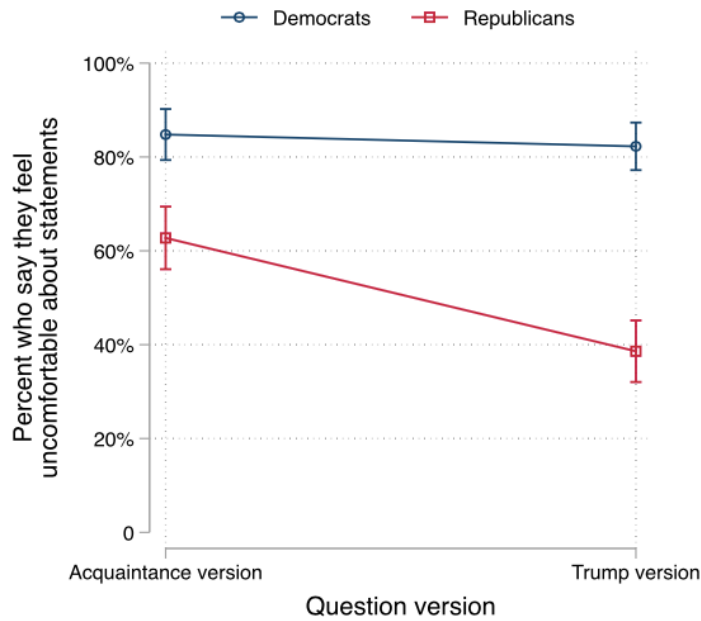
<sup>43</sup> Kelly Oxford. "Women: tweet me your first assaults. They aren't just stats. I'll go first: Old man on city bus grabs my "pussy" and smiles at me, I'm 12", *Twitter*, 8 Oct 2016, <https://twitter.com/kellyoxford/status/784541062119456769>

by women to denounce sexual assault and everyday sexism on social media. Kelly Oxford went on encouraging women to share their stories, by using the hashtag #notokay, and once again, received many replies from women of all ages speaking about their first sexual assault. Other movements and hashtags were born on Twitter after the release of the tape, such as #GrabYourWallet for example. This hashtag was launched by marketing consultant Shannon Coulter, on October 11, in reaction to the *Access Hollywood* tape. Sickened by what she had heard, Coulter created this movement to encourage people to boycott Trump companies and shops selling Trump-branded items.<sup>44</sup> As a result, some brands, such as Nordstrom for instance, decided to distance themselves from Trump companies, proving how impactful feminist movements on social media can be (Halzack). Though Trump's lewd remarks did encourage feminism, they also had negative effects. According to journalist Joshua Holland, the tape also made sexism among Republicans even worse than before, as they were no longer as ashamed to express it.<sup>45</sup> In his article published in *The Nation* Holland details a survey taken around the time of the election by political scientist Brian Schaffner. In this survey, Schaffner divided people into two groups, Republicans and Democrats, and asked them whether they would feel uncomfortable if a close relative uttered sexist remarks, and how they would feel when knowing Donald Trump said these things.

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<sup>44</sup> Sarah Halzack. "The Woman behind the Boycott That Is Pressuring Retailers to Dump the Trumps." *The Independent*, 14 Feb. 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/grab-your-wallet-trump-boycott-products-us-retailers-shannon-coulter-nordstrom-donald-jr-ivanka-eric-a7579776.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Joshua Holland. *Trump Has Made Republicans More Comfortable Expressing Their Sexism Out Loud*. Oct. 2018. [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com), <https://www.thenation.com/article/trump-has-made-republicans-more-comfortable-expressing-their-sexism-out-loud/>.



According to the survey, sixty-three percent of Republican people who were asked these questions would feel uncomfortable hearing these words from a relative, while only thirty-nine percent would be disturbed if they came from the presidential nominee.<sup>46</sup> On the democratic side, the percentage of people who would feel uncomfortable hearing sexist remarks is much higher in both cases: eighty-five percent of the people surveyed would feel uncomfortable hearing sexist comments from an acquaintance and eighty-two percent would feel the same way if the comments were coming from Trump (Schaffner). Schaffner thus argues that Democrats are much less likely to approve of this kind of “locker room talk” than Republicans. This “locker room talk” also attracted the attention in legal circles. Civil rights attorney Lisa Bloom, known as publicly standing against Trump by representing women who accused him of sexual assault, described his remarks as being just that. In an interview, she gives her thoughts about the scandal and its media coverage: “Let’s be very clear, he is talking

<sup>46</sup> Brian Schaffner. *Trump, the 2016 Election, and Expressions of Sexism*. 2016, <https://tufts.app.box.com/s/osn0u29f41lj6qmotuav87hwe7xbg9xh>.

about sexual assault. He is talking about grabbing a woman's genitals without her consent. Some of the media has described it as locker room talk. It's way beyond that."<sup>47</sup> By giving a definition of sexual assault – inappropriate gestures towards a woman without her consent– Bloom argues that feminism is needed to fight this kind of behavior. For her, sexism still wins in a sense since this scandal did not prevent Trump from being elected President of the United States (Bloom, Burleigh).

### **1.3.2. Hillary Clinton, a hope for some feminists to break the glass ceiling**

The phrase “sexual assault” was also used by former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton both before and after the election. In 2017, she published a book entitled *What Happened*, in which she explains why she lost, and how “sexism and misogyny played a big role” in her defeat.<sup>48</sup> Like Lisa Bloom, Clinton talks about sexual assault to denounce Trump's horrific words. She even goes slightly further: in addition to saying that he sexually assaulted women, she adds that he was actually bragging about it (Clinton, 114). In her book, Clinton does not just denounce this utterance of Trump's sexism, she depicts him as an utterly sexist character. This denunciation of Trump and the fact that Clinton was the first ever female candidate to be nominated by a major party led many people to consider her as a feminist candidate. She was seen as a hope to finally break the glass ceiling, a metaphor for the barrier that keeps women from being elected to higher offices. This glass ceiling argument was so central to her campaign that she had planned to give her victory speech on the stage of the Javits Center in Manhattan, under a ceiling made of glass. Hillary Clinton's supporters, left-

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<sup>47</sup> Nina Burleigh “‘He Grabbed Me’: Woman Alleges Trump Groped Her Exactly as Described on Tape.” *Newsweek*, 8 Oct. 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-words-echo-womans-allegations-507763>.

<sup>48</sup> Hillary Clinton. *What Happened*, Simon & Schuster, London, New York, 2017, 114

wing journalists and celebrities, as well as Clinton herself (Clinton, 120), argue that she did not lose because of her program, but because she was a woman. *Time* correspondent Charlotte Alter claims that if Clinton had been a man she would not have been as scrutinized by the media and she would have been much more popular among voters.<sup>49</sup> Clinton acknowledges this claim in her book, *What Happened*, by extending the sexism she felt in her campaign to all women who enter the political process. By doing so she positions herself as a feminist politician seeking to help other female candidates to break the glass ceiling by denouncing the blatant sexism in America. She gives many examples of women being criticized for their appearance, their ambition, their displays of emotions and their ability to control themselves. These characteristics are never attributed to men, who are almost only commented for their political program, and praised for things women would be criticized for. For her, and most feminists will agree with that statement, sexism in politics and in the society in general is all about the likability of women. She claims that “The more successful a man is, the more people like him. With women, it’s the exact opposite. The more professionally successful we are, the less people like us” (Clinton, 125). Stories of men being congratulated for their promotion in a company or when they get a raise, and of women who probably could not have gotten there without help or without seducing her boss are common knowledge. And we have all seen movies in which a female head of a company is represented as being bossy and tyrannic, something that is rarely attributed to men. These stereotypes contribute to everyday sexism and the idea of the likability of women. Trump did call her “a nasty woman” when she was ahead of him in opinion polls. Sexism and misogyny were not only expressed by Trump himself but also by his supporters. Reporter Peter Beinart, from *The Atlantic*, tells his readers about what he saw at the Republican National Convention in July 2016 in Cleveland: pins, T-

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<sup>49</sup> Charlotte Alter. “Hillary Clinton Collides Again With Highest Glass Ceiling.” *Time*, 9 Nov. 2016, <http://time.com/4564142/hillary-clinton-gender/>.



shirts and other goodies supporting Donald Trump with offensive messages about Clinton.<sup>50</sup>

This big amount of sexism towards her did her a lot harm, but it had a somehow positive impact: it made her more popular, or at least it did not cause her lasting harm. A Gallup survey taken every year lists the most admired people in America, and its 2017 edition put Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton at the top of their lists, with respectively seventeen and nine percent of votes.<sup>51</sup>

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Most Admired Man</b>					
Barack Obama	16	19	17	22	17
<b>Most Admired Woman</b>					
Hillary Clinton	15	12	13	12	9

Despite her detractors who were proudly supporting Trump, she was indeed popular among Democrats but also among some feminists. This idea was recognized by several left-wing newspapers such as *The New York Times*, which published an article entitled “Hillary Clinton Ignited a Feminist Movement. By Losing.” The author of this piece, Amy Chozick, argues that a big part of the feminist movement that took place after the election was due to the defeat of the first female candidate nominated by a major political party.<sup>52</sup> Feminism could first be found in Clinton’s reaction to her defeat, in a tweet that was liked by more than a 1,3 million people, shared more than 673,000 times and that has more than 110,000 replies: “To

<sup>50</sup> See Peter Beinart. “Fear of a Female President”, *The Atlantic*, Oct. 2016 issue, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/10/fear-of-a-female-president/497564/>

<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones. “Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton Retain Most Admired Titles”, *Gallup*, 27 Dec. 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/224672/barack-obama-hillary-clinton-retain-admired-titles.aspx>

<sup>52</sup> Amy Chozick. “Hillary Clinton Ignited a Feminist Movement. By Losing.”, *The New York Times*, 13 Jan. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/13/sunday-review/hillary-clinton-feminist-movement.html>

all the little girls watching...never doubt that you are valuable and powerful & deserving of every chance & opportunity in the world” (Clinton, *Twitter*). This feminist tweet encouraging women empowerment received thousands of positive reactions on the social network. But the defeat in general had wider consequences. In the same article, Amy Chozick explains that Clinton’s defeat was the main trigger for many feminist events that took place since the election: Women’s Marches, record winning numbers of women seeking for office on a local or national scale, etc.

However this feminist enthusiasm was coupled with backlash from other feminists: for many, her gender does not make Hillary Clinton a feminist. In addition to proving Clinton’s success among feminists, Chozick confirms this information in her *New York Times* article. She refers to some women’s rights activists who think Clinton should not be part of modern feminist movements such as #MeToo because of the many sexual scandals that occurred in the 1990s during her husband’s presidency. Similarly to Trump, Bill Clinton was accused of having sexually harassed and assaulted several women and was always defended by his wife. This idea is expressed by other writers such as Eugene Scott from *The Washington Post*: he names a specific case in which Hillary’s feminism can seriously be doubted: the Monica Lewinsky affair.<sup>53</sup> In his article he quotes Monica Lewinsky herself, talking about the scandal two decades later: “what transpired between Bill Clinton and myself was not sexual assault, although we now recognize that it constituted a gross abuse of power.” (Lewinsky, Scott) Abuse of power, from a man on a woman, *is* sexist. As a result, Scott’s tangible argument is that Hillary Clinton seems to condemn sexism and sexual assault in any case except when it seems to be directly correlated to her husband. A lot of feminists agree with him and thus think she should not play very important role in feminist movements. This backlash explains

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<sup>53</sup> Eugene Scott. “Hillary Clinton’s Willful Misunderstanding of the #MeToo Movement.” *The Washington Post*, 15 Oct. 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

why fewer and fewer people chose her as the woman they admire the most: this percentage fell from 15% to 9% in only four years.<sup>54</sup> Despite these criticisms, Hillary Clinton has still remained a hope for women to get to higher offices at the national level, and, one day, to the White House.

### **1.3.3: Women's Marches**

Hillary Clinton's defeat or Donald Trump's election, despite the allegations of sexual assault against him, did trigger feminist movements anterior to #MeToo. The best example of these is the high number of Women's Marches across the country after Trump became President. The very first Women's March took place on January 21, 2017, the day after the President's inauguration. The event was born after Teresa Shook from Hawaii launched an invitation on Facebook to gather in Washington to protest about Trump's victory.<sup>55</sup> Other organizers like Bob Bland in New York announced similar marches on social media and according to her, about 35,000 people replied to her invitation less than a day after it was announced.<sup>56</sup> This high number of replies echoes the turnout at the marches: according to Matt Broomfield from *The Independent*, between 3,3 and 4,6 million people marched in the United States to protest Trump's election.<sup>57</sup> Unlike in other demonstrations, no arrests were

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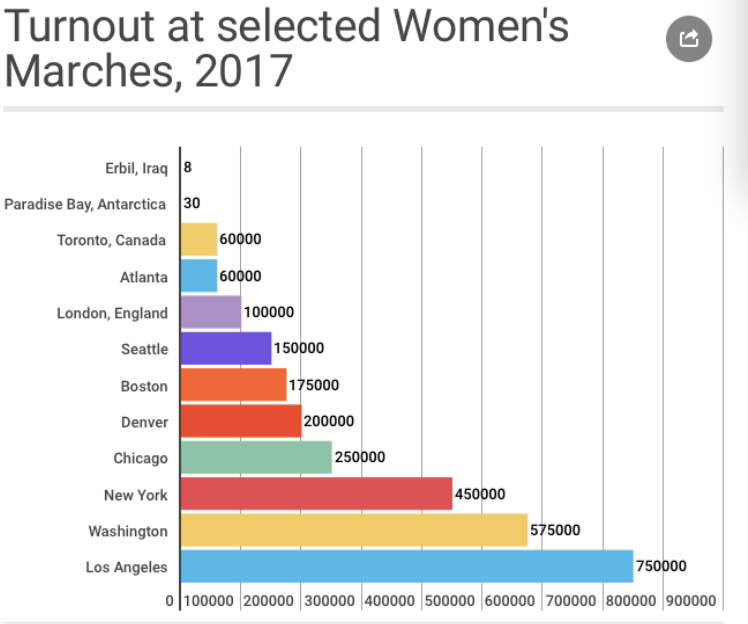
<sup>54</sup> See table on page 23.

<sup>55</sup> John P. Rafferty. "Women's March." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14 Jan. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Womens-March-2017>.

<sup>56</sup> Bob Bland, in Ellen Wulforst. "Trump Inauguration To Be Met By Mass 'Women's March On Washington.'" *Huffington Post*, 11 Nov. 2016. *Huff Post*, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-million-women-march\\_us\\_582642efe4b0c4b63b0cbfa5](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-million-women-march_us_582642efe4b0c4b63b0cbfa5).

<sup>57</sup> Matt Broomfield. "Women's March Against Donald Trump Is the Largest Day of Protests in US History, Say Political Scientist." *The Independent*, 23 Jan. 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/womens-march-anti-donald-trump-womens-rights-largest-protest-demonstration-us-history-political-a7541081.html>.

reported, thus making the Women’s Marches one of the most peaceful demonstrations in American history (Broomfield). In the same article from *The Independent* can be found a chart listing the biggest turnouts at each major demonstration in the United States as well as in some locations elsewhere around the globe.



This chart shows that the biggest demonstration took place in Los Angeles, where many celebrities showed up such as Miley Cyrus, Jane Fonda, and Kerry Washington, among others. The second biggest Women’s March took place in Washington where 575,000 demonstrators marched (Broomfield). As this chart was made only three days after the March, the numbers were not exact yet. The Women’s March website later details how many people attended. According to the organization’s 2017 annual report, 800,000 to 1.2 million people marched in Washington D.C.<sup>58</sup> This chart also lists cities outside the United States such as London and Toronto which respectively held demonstrations attended by 100,000 and 60,000 marchers. But what is striking here is that Women’s Marches also took place in very remote

<sup>58</sup> *Women’s March Annual Report 2017*. Women’s March, December 2017, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3feb79fcf7fdce5a3c790b/t/5c422af80e2e725f8f0ea8f8/1547840252450/2017%2BWM%2BAnnual%2BReport\\_LoRes.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3feb79fcf7fdce5a3c790b/t/5c422af80e2e725f8f0ea8f8/1547840252450/2017%2BWM%2BAnnual%2BReport_LoRes.pdf)

places like in Antarctica. People also marched in countries where women's rights are seriously threatened, like in Iraq where only eight marchers dared defying the Islamic laws. These marches all over the world showed the impact of Donald Trump's election on feminism not only in America but also in other countries or other continents. As a consequence, these marches turned into a political movement standing for everything and everyone Trump criticized. The Women's Marches website lists all the "unity principles" of the movement, meaning everything they defend, going beyond feminism. Its main principles are the defense of reproductive rights and the end of gender inequalities in the criminal justice system and in society in general. The movement also works in favor of LGBT+ rights, disability rights, immigrant rights and environmental rights, everything that was either mocked or criticized by the new president.<sup>59</sup> These principles help to define the mission of the movement which is "to harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to create transformative social change." (Women's Marches Website) This aim to create social change is visible through the impacts of the Women's Marches. The consequences of the movement can mainly be seen at the political level. It even gave birth to another movement called #PowerToThePolls, which organizes events to encourage women to engage in the political process either by voting or by running for office.<sup>60</sup> #PowerToThePolls gave women tools and set up training programs for female Democrats to run in the Mid Terms in 2018 (#PowerToThePolls website). This movement is coupled with an organization called EMILY's List, which also organizes training sessions for pro-choice Democratic women to run for office and be elected. Founded in 1985, the organization aims to create equality in the legislative process by giving more positions of power to progressive women. The purpose of

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<sup>59</sup> See the other principles on <https://womensmarch.com/mission-and-principles>

<sup>60</sup> See the #PowerToThePolls website: <http://www.powertothepolls.com/>

this is to give more voice to women and minorities, such as people of color or people with diverse religions.<sup>61</sup> The development of sub-movements and the use of feminist organizations such as EMILY's List show how impactful the Women's Marches were.

Though the Women's March has had positive impacts on feminism and political elections, the movement was far from being perfect, at least when it started in January 2017. It was criticized by many people, starting with the main subject matter of the protests: the president. On Twitter, he responded to the marches by bragging to have won the presidency and by implying that the protesters did not vote during the 2016 election.<sup>62</sup> But for once, the biggest criticism did not come from Donald Trump but from people of color. According to an article published on *The Washington Post* by reporter Lavanya Ramanathan, many black people, especially women, saw the movement as another way of expressing white privilege.<sup>63</sup> This thought is justified by the peacefulness of the protests: in her article, Lavanya Ramanathan quotes author Nigerian Luvvie Ajayi who declares that "white women and white bodies can hold space on streets and shut down cities 'peacefully' because they are allowed to. Black and brown people who march are assaulted by cops." She also claims that only white women are protected.<sup>64</sup> By saying this she denounces everyday police violence on blacks and contradicts the principle of racial equality promoted by the organizers of the

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<sup>61</sup> See the EMILY's List website: <https://www.emilyslist.org/pages/entry/our-mission>

<sup>62</sup>@realdonaldtrump. "Watched Protests Yesterday but Was under the Impression That We Just Had an Election! Why Didn't These People Vote? Celebs Hurt Cause Badly." *Twitter*, 22 Jan. 2017, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/823150055418920960>.

<sup>63</sup>Lavanya Ramanathan. "Was the Women's March Just Another Display of White Privilege? Some Think So." *Washington Post*, 24 Jan. 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/was-the-womens-march-just-another-display-of-white-privilege-some-think-so/2017/01/24/00bbdcca-e1a0-11e6-a547-5fb9411d332c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/was-the-womens-march-just-another-display-of-white-privilege-some-think-so/2017/01/24/00bbdcca-e1a0-11e6-a547-5fb9411d332c_story.html).

<sup>64</sup> Luvvie Ajayi, quoted by Lavanya Ramanathan. "Was the Women's March Just Another Display of White Privilege? Some Think So.", *The Washington Post*.

Women's March. Ajavi and other black activists thus decided to boycott the protests as they felt excluded from the friendly relationships between marchers and police officers (Ramanathan). But black women were not the only ones to feel excluded from the marches. Criticism also came from pro-life women who felt they were unwanted in the Marches. We can thus wonder whether anti-abortion women can consider themselves as feminists. This question is being answered in an article written by Emily Crockett for *Vox*, with interviews of pro-choice marchers: some said yes, some said no.<sup>65</sup> But even though some of them agreed to let pro-life women into the march, they still felt excluded from it as a huge number of signs promoted pro-choice ideas and most of the sponsors for the march were pro-choice organizations such as Planned Parenthood. They felt even more excluded as anti-abortion feminist organizations tried to get partnership with the Women's March and were rejected after facing backlash from pro-choice organizations and protesters (Crockett).

Despite these criticisms, the first Women's Marches were successful regarding the numbers of participants and the positive reactions on social media. But the exclusion felt by women of color and anti-abortion feminists led organizers to think again on how to proceed for the following years. The 2018 and 2019 demonstrations thus showed an attempt to be more inclusive in response to the 2017 backlash. Still, some black women and anti-abortion women decided not to attend the march, and transgender people still felt excluded.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Emily Crockett. "Can You Be a 'pro-Life Feminist'? The Women's March on Washington Offered Some Insights." *Vox*, 22 Jan. 2017, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/1/22/14335292/womens-march-washington-abortion-pro-life-feminists>.

<sup>66</sup> Mabinty Quarshie. "Is the Women's March More Inclusive This Year?" *Usatoday*, 20 Jan. 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/01/18/womens-march-more-inclusive-year/1038859001/>.

**1.3.4: Women for Trump: Favoring Sexism or Neglecting Feminism?**

Though most women were shocked and disgusted by Trump’s opinion on women and the fact that he got away with bragging about sexual assault, it is interesting to think about the other women, those who still voted for him and gave him their support. One of the surprising outcomes of the 2016 election is that even if a majority of women voted for Hillary Clinton, the percentage of white women who voted for Trump is much higher than expected, as proven by CNN polls:<sup>67</sup>

gender				race and gender			
	clinton	trump	other/no answer		clinton	trump	other/no answer
male 47%	41%	52%	7%	white men 34%	31%	62%	7%
female 53%	54%	41%	5%	white women 37%	43%	52%	5%
24558 respondents				black men 5%	82%	13%	5%
				black women 7%	94%	4%	2%
				latino men 5%	63%	32%	5%
				latino women 6%	69%	25%	6%
				others 6%	61%	31%	8%
				24558 respondents			

According to these polls, 54% of women voted for Hillary Clinton and 52 percent of men voted for Donald Trump, regardless of color. But when color is included in the statistics of votes, it is striking to see that 53% of white women helped to elect the president when 94% of black women voted for Hillary Clinton. This raises an important question about feminism in the United States: why did so many women vote for an openly sexist candidate only a few months before #MeToo? Do they consider themselves feminists? Or did they choose sexism over feminism? Journalist Hannah Fearn explains in an article from *The Independent* the

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<sup>67</sup> These polls, among others, can be found on the CNN website: <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>



reasons why so many white women voted for Donald Trump.<sup>68</sup> She first confirms polls that were taken at the time: most women who voted for Trump do not have a college degree (Fearn). This information is proven by another CNN poll:

education among whites by sex			
	clinton	trump	other/no answer
white college-grad women 20%	51%	44%	5%
white non-college women 17%	34%	61%	5%
white college-grad men 17%	39%	53%	8%
white non-college men 16%	23%	71%	6%
non-whites 29%	74%	21%	5%
24558 respondents			

This table shows that most white women without a college education voted for the Republican candidate (61%) when white women with a degree were more likely to vote for Clinton. Now that we know more precisely who voted for Trump among American women, we ought to wonder for what reasons. According to journalist Dorothy Parraz in an interview by news broadcaster TRT World, the main reason given by women for voting for Trump is his promise to limit immigration in order to preserve “whiteness.”<sup>69</sup> In her article published in *The Independent*, Hannah Fearn gives another reason why women voted for the Republican nominee: their difficult relationship with feminism. She says white women without a college degree are more likely to face sexism everyday. As a consequence they are not so shocked when a presidential candidate says he uses his fame to kiss and grope women without their

<sup>68</sup> Hannah Fearn. “These are the real reasons women voted for Donald Trump – and they’re terrifying”, *The Independent*, 10 Nov 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/donald-trump-president-women-voted-for-white-college-educated-working-class-reasons-terrifying-a7409596.html>

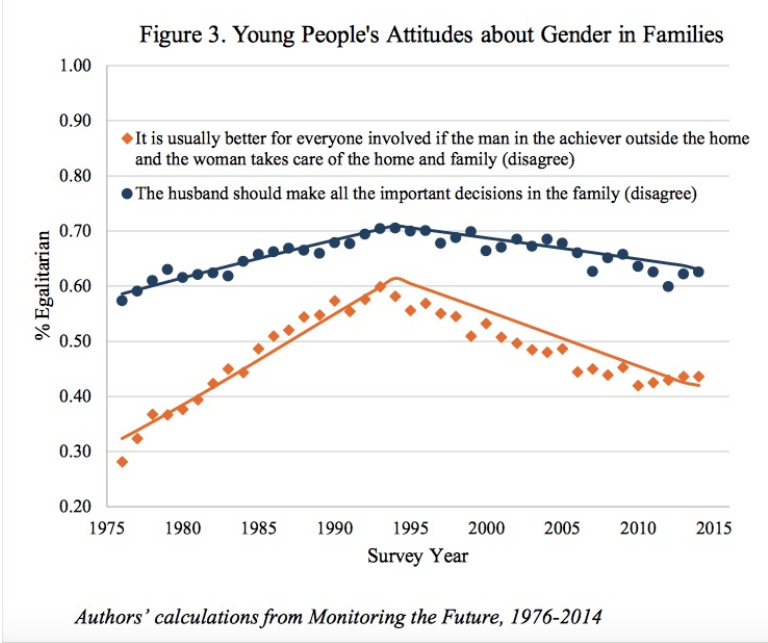
<sup>69</sup> Dorothy Parvaz. “Why Women Vote For Trump: the US President and Sexism”, *Youtube*, uploaded by TRT World, 5 Nov 2018, T

consent. For the journalist, the economic factor is a key one to women's perception of feminism: she says, "the less economic power a woman has, the less social power she can exert in fighting back against such maltreatment" (Fearn). It is true that poor women are not used to the language filters and the political correctness that can be found in highly ranked institutions. This leads to a normalization of sexism, which is thus not disturbing for women who are used to it. For Fearn, their misinterpretation of feminism is another factor. Women who voted for Trump interpret feminism as a threat to the power they have at home, as it is supposed to put gender roles on an equal footing. In other words, they think that going to work or encouraging men to take part in housework would mean losing the power they have at home (Fearn). These female Trump voters who particularly care about the idea of women staying at home can be considered as "traditional wives," who lead a traditional way of life which is sometimes nicknamed "Trad-life". Traditional wives have been defined as follows: "Women of the Tradlife worship their husbands and their home, embracing the 1950's housewife lifestyle and the European country men of prewar Europe."<sup>70</sup> It means traditional wives do care about gender roles and the idea of the male breadwinner and the housewife. This way of life can be considered by some as being old-fashioned. It is thus all the more surprising to see how well established it is today. This traditional lifestyle has developed in older couples as well as in younger ones. The number of millennials who want this type of old-school union has even been increasing. According to a study led by the Council of Contemporary Families, the number of millennial men who think that the husband should be

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<sup>70</sup> Nicolette Michelle. "Women With a Purpose: The New Wave of the Alt-Right Tradwives." *Medium*, 8 June 2018, <https://medium.com/@luvnicomichelle/women-with-a-purpose-the-new-wave-of-the-alt-right-tradwives-c980550a699d>.

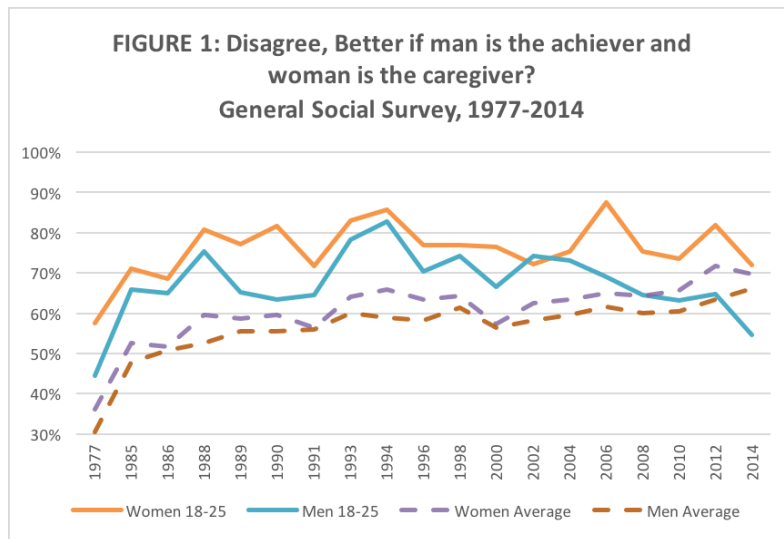
the main income earner rose from 42% in 1994 to 58% percent in 2014.<sup>71</sup> The same could be said about the percentage of men thinking that the man should take all the important decisions: 30% thought so in 1994, and this number rose to 40% in 2014.



This chart shows how many people disagree with this point of view, and it is striking to see how much the numbers are falling, hence the increase of people who do agree with the idea of the husbands deciding on everything. Furthermore, the number of millennial men who are against traditional gender roles went from 83% to 55% in twenty years. But men were not the only ones to give their opinion of gender roles:

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<sup>71</sup> Stephanie Coontz. “Council of Contemporary Gender and Millennial Symposium, *Council of Contemporary Families*, 31 Mar. 2017, <https://contemporaryfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FINAL-CCF-Gender-Millennial-1.pdf>  
 Stephanie Coontz. *Opinion | Do Millennial Men Want Stay-at-Home Wives?* 31 Mar. 2017, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/31/opinion/sunday/do-millennial-men-want-stay-at-home-wives.html>.



This chart also shows the women’s opinion on the subject: similarly to men’s, the number of women who disagree with traditional gender roles fell from 85% to 72%. Though smaller than the men’s shift of opinion on gender roles, the fact that fewer women are disturbed by traditional roles in families indicates that feminism has not convinced everyone yet and that some are still not disturbed by everyday sexism.

The problem is thus to know whether these behaviors were changed in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Despite this backlash against feminism, one cannot deny that we *are* in a fourth wave of feminism (Cochrane), thanks to the rise of #MeToo.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See page 8.

## **2. #MeToo: More Than a Hashtag, a Feminist Revolution?**

### **2.1. What is #MeToo?**

#### **2.1.1: Creation**

The year 2017 will be remembered for many things. The inauguration of Donald Trump, terrorist attacks, and natural catastrophes made the news all over the year. But the one event that will stick in the minds of many is the creation of a movement: #MeToo. However, the very first utterance of these words with a feminist purpose was much earlier than one may think, in 2006. The phrase “Me Too” was coined by black feminist activist Tarana Burke, who founded and worked in non-profit associations to denounce sexual abuse on young women of color.<sup>73</sup> One of these associations was Just Be Inc. Its aim was to give confidence to these young girls and women and help them find their place in the society for their voices to be heard.<sup>74</sup> In a youth camp organized by the association in Alabama, a thirteen-year old girl told Tarana Burke about being sexually assaulted by a relative. Burke did not find a suitable answer at the time and reflected upon this event by thinking she should have said “#MeToo.”<sup>75</sup> As a consequence she created a My Space page for her movement and started to receive replies from girls and women from various backgrounds. Since then, the #MeToo movement has sought to help victims of sexual assault regardless of race, age, or even gender, as men have also been welcomed to share their stories of sexual assault. During these years,

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<sup>73</sup> [biography.com](https://www.biography.com/people/tarana-burke) Editors. “Tarana Burke Biography.” *Biography*, 1 Mar 2018, <https://www.biography.com/people/tarana-burke>.

<sup>74</sup> See the Just Be Inc website, <https://justbeinc.wixsite.com/justbeinc/purpose-mission-and-vision>

<sup>75</sup> Abby Ohlheiser. “The Woman behind ‘MeToo’ Knew The Power of the Phrase When She Created It - 10 Years Ago”, *The Washington Post*, 19 Oct. 2017 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>

especially after the revival of the movement, Tarana Burke has been making sure the movement was defined properly. In interviews and speeches, she often gives #MeToo the following definition: “#MeToo is especially about survivors supporting survivors. And it’s really about community healing and community action.”<sup>76</sup> The movement thus puts emphasis on the victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault to help them find a path to a normal life.

Thanks to all this important work to help survivors of sexual assault and sexism in general, Tarana Burke became a very influential personality after #MeToo went viral. Along with other feminist celebrities such as Taylor Swift or Ashley Judd, Tarana Burke was named “Person of the Year” by the magazine *Time* in its December 2017 issue. Though not appearing on the cover of the magazine, Burke was and still is considered as part of this group called “The Silence Breakers.” The Silence Breakers are women from various backgrounds: from singers and actresses to hospital workers and hotel housekeepers. But famous or not, rich or poor, young or old, black or white, these women each have contributed to the #MeToo movement by sharing their stories of sexual assault. In interviews, they testify about being insulted, groped, and threatened by men at work or in private: “He said that if I ever wronged him, he would have me kidnapped, have my eyes gouged out with a Bic pen and throw me into the Hudson river.”<sup>77</sup> “I thought, What just happened? Why didn’t I react? I kept thinking, Did I do something, did I say something, did I look a certain way to make him think that was

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<sup>76</sup> Tarana Burke, in a video published in Chris Snyder, and Linette Lopez. “Tarana Burke On Why She Created The #MeToo Movement - And Where Its Headed”, *Business Insider*, 13 Dec. 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-the-metoo-movement-started-where-its-headed-tarana-burke-time-person-of-year-women-2017-12?IR=T>

<sup>77</sup> Selma Blair, in an interview by Stephanie Zacharek et al. “The Silence Breakers”, *Time*, December 2017 issue, <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/>

O.K.?”<sup>78</sup> These quotes sum up what #MeToo is all about: denouncing sexist and tyrannical behaviors to help other women to come forward, which is the original aim of the movement created by activist Burke. These feminist interventions would probably not have been possible without Burke, who is to be remembered as the original creator of #MeToo.

### **2.1.2: #MeToo: A Movement Made Popular Thanks to Social Media**

But Tarana Burke is not the only one who should be given credit for the development of #MeToo. Another woman was listed among the *Time* Silence Breakers for bringing #MeToo to light: actress Alyssa Milano, without whom no one (or few people at least) would have heard about the feminist movement of recent times. The #MeToo movement as we know it was reborn on October 15, 2017, on Twitter. The hashtag went viral after Alyssa Milano tweeted:

“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. If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.”<sup>79</sup>

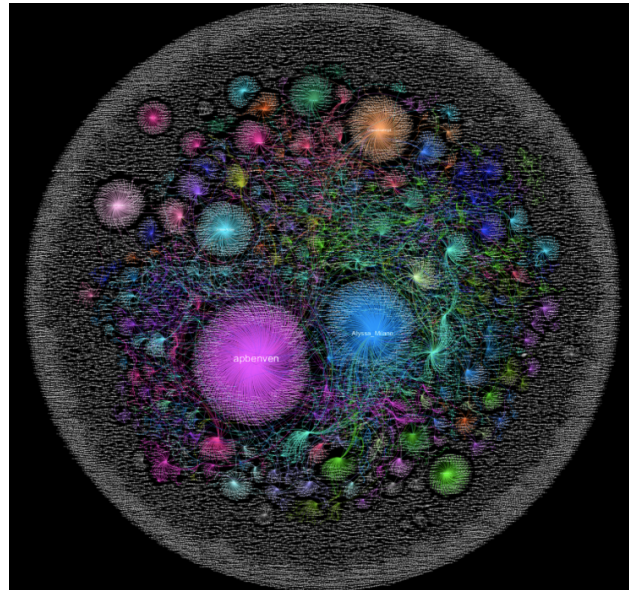
This tweet met with immediate success: it was retweeted more than 23,700 times, liked by over 52,300 people and has more than 66,000 replies. It launched an international movement as the hashtag was used all across the planet. Specialists tried to analyze the number of people who used #MeToo closer to the day it went viral. The experiment conducted by artist Erin Gallagher about the spread of #MeToo is striking: she collected thousands of tweets in the

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<sup>78</sup> Anonymous Hospital Worker, in the same *Time* interview.

<sup>79</sup> @Alyssa\_Milano. “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” *Twitter*, 15 Oct. 2017, [https://twitter.com/Alyssa\\_Milano/status/919659438700670976](https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976)

first 31 hours after Alyssa Milano’s tweet and created an visual chart showing the networks between different communities who used the hashtag.



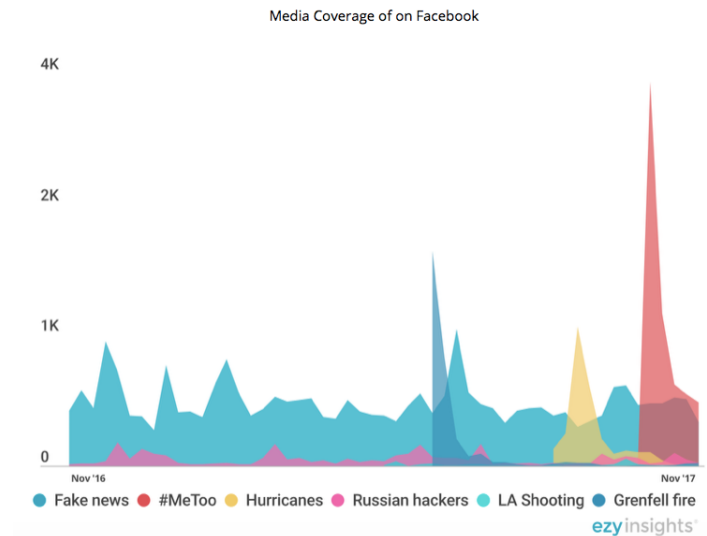
According to its author, this graph shows more than 24,700 tweets on the #MeToo hashtag. Erin Gallagher explains that “the dense areas filled with what looks like white dots are tens of thousands of small groups of people connecting in the #MeToo hashtag.”<sup>80</sup> It shows how fast the movement spread on Twitter. This chart only focuses on this specific social medium, and to know that this hashtag was also used on other platforms such as Facebook proves how popular it was. The latter, which is used by more than a billion people every day,<sup>81</sup> has also been a very important device for the spread of the #MeToo movement online.

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<sup>80</sup> Erin Gallagher. “#MeToo Hashtag Network Visualization.” *Medium*, 20 Oct. 2017, [https://medium.com/@erin\\_gallagher/metoo-hashtag-network-visualization-960dd5a97cdf](https://medium.com/@erin_gallagher/metoo-hashtag-network-visualization-960dd5a97cdf).

<sup>81</sup> “The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics.” Zephoría Institute, updated Mar. 2019, <https://zephoría.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>





This chart published by EzyInsights shows the media coverage on Facebook of some of the subjects which made the news in 2017, such as natural disorders or political events. #MeToo is clearly the subject that was the most dealt with on Facebook, far ahead of other important topics such as the Grenfell Fire in London or the issue of fake news that was still much commented upon on social media.<sup>82</sup>

Though very high in the first hours, the number of people using the hashtag kept increasing day after day. According to *The Telegraph*, seven days after #MeToo started to trend on Twitter, a million people had tweeted on the #MeToo hashtag.<sup>83</sup> The author of the article, Helena Horton, also provides more details about those who used the hashtag. She published a chart showing the percentage of people who used this hashtag by gender. Of course, a majority of #MeToo users are women, as they are more likely to be sexually assaulted. But what could be surprising here is the number of men who came forward: 30,01% of tweets were written by men, against 69,99% which were posted by women. These

<sup>82</sup> “#MeToo, The Viral Event of 2017,” *EzyInsights*, 29 Nov. 2017, <https://ezyinsights.com/metoo-viral-event-2017-1/>

<sup>83</sup> Helena Horton. “300,000 Men Join in with #MeToo Sexual Assault Hashtag.” *The Telegraph*, 18 Oct. 2017. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/18/300000-men-join-metoo-sexual-assault-hashtag/>.

numbers show that the #MeToo movement was not exclusively made for women but for everybody, and that its aim is to help victims of sexual assault regardless of gender.

This number of women and men coming forward may not have been possible without the platforms they used. Indeed, social media have become very important for people living in the twenty-first century. Online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram have grown into helpful tools for millennials as well as older people to share their life experiences and to give their opinion on popular and political issues. This ability to express one's opinion makes it easier for people to engage in activism for causes they support. In a article published on *Medium*, Katie Thomson explains how a movement is created on social media: it all starts by a "triggering event" which provokes mass reactions on social media due to the widespread coverage on these new tools.<sup>84</sup> If enough people talk about it on social media, the hashtag might have consequences in the real world.<sup>85</sup> This massive use of social media to express ideas and inflate political movements is central in today's activism, more precisely feminist activism. According to Ealasaid Munro, "Contemporary feminism is characterized by its diversity of purpose, but the reliance on the Internet is constant."<sup>86</sup> This idea was expressed a few years before #MeToo went viral, which confirms the success of this hashtag and the power of social media in today's feminism. This idea was put forward by Kira Cochrane, also in 2013, in a book and an article derived from her book that was published in *The Guardian*, *All the Rebel Women: The Rise of Fourth Wave Feminism*. Though her book is mostly set in

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<sup>84</sup> Katie Thomson. "Social Media Activism and the #MeToo Movement." *Medium*, 12 June 2018, <https://medium.com/@kmtomson.11/social-media-activism-and-the-metoo-movement-166f452d7fd2>.

<sup>85</sup> Rodrigo and José Ramón Gil-García. "Towards cyberactivism 2.0? Understanding the use of social media and other information technologies for political activism and social movements." *Government Information Quarterly*, 31 (2014): 365-378.

<sup>86</sup> Ealasaid Munro. "Feminism, A Fourth Wave?" *Political Insight*, vol. 4, no. 2, Sept. 2013, pp. 22–25. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1111/2041-9066.12021.

the United Kingdom, her theories are applicable to the American context: women have a similar access to social networks and most of them also strive for equality in a society where sexual harassment and assault or pay gap based on gender are still pretty much alive. In her article she also describes online social platforms as “tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online.”<sup>87</sup> These theories, studied by Cochrane, Munro and others, prove the important role played by social media in the success of #MeToo.

### **2.1.3: Main Flaws**

The high number of people using #MeToo to come forward shows how successful the movement is. But like any political or activist movement it was not praised by everybody. The first negative opinions came from members of the black community who felt excluded from the movement. Some of them felt a strong disappointment seeing how the movement drifted from its original goal, which was to help victims from underprivileged communities and women of color. This feeling of disappointment was voiced by the creator of the #MeToo movement herself, Tarana Burke. In an interview for *Essence*, a magazine which mainly targets African American women, Burke explains why black victims of sexual assault had trouble fitting in with other members of #MeToo: "The world responds to the vulnerability of white women. Our narrative has never been centered in mainstream media. Our stories don't get told and as a result, it makes us feel not as valuable."<sup>88</sup> This point of view is very understandable as #MeToo barely made headlines (or at least not as much as today) when it

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<sup>87</sup> Kira Cochrane. “The Fourth Wave Of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women”, *The Guardian*, 10 Dec 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women>

<sup>88</sup> Tarana Burke. “Tarana Burke Explains Why Black Women Don't Think #MeToo Is For Them”, interview by Danielle Young, *Essence*, 7 Nov. 2018 <https://www.essence.com/videos/tarana-burke-explains-why-black-women-dont-think-metoo-is-for-them/>

was created and mostly used by black women twelve years ago; whereas it was all over the news when it started to be used by white women. This frustration thus led to divisions between black and white women, when the #MeToo movement was supposed to unite them as victims of sexism. But this is not the only reason why black women felt alienated from #MeToo. Having brought down many high-profile men accused of sexual assault, the #MeToo movement did leave some victims unsatisfied. The early weeks of 2019 were marked by the disgrace of yet another artist accused of sexual assault. After Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey, it was singer R. Kelly's turn. However, the R Kelly scandal did not start as recently as one might think. Allegations against him had been circulating ever since the 1990s. For almost three decades Kelly has been accused of sexual intercourse with underage girls and of founding a sex cult in which women were abused. If these accusations started in the 1990s, one ought to wonder why it has taken so long to bring down a singer accused of so many crimes. For black women the answer comes from the color of his victim's skins. According to *Washington Globe* columnist Renée Graham, if Kelly's victim's had been white he would not have been able to keep performing his songs in shows or releasing albums.<sup>89</sup> She compares his case to the one that launched #MeToo on social media, the Harvey Weinstein's case: "Weinstein is a pariah because many of his accusers are famous white women. Kelly's alleged victims are discredited by their blackness" (Graham). Speaking of Harvey Weinstein, his non-white victims share this feeling of indifference from the mainstream media. In the same article, Renée Graham quotes actress Salma Hayek who states that "Women of color are less

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<sup>89</sup> Renée Graham. "Black Women Are Waiting for Their #MeToo Moment." *Boston Globe*, 15 May 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/05/15/black-women-are-waiting-for-their-metoo-moment/BuZ8QJXP09k6ZNKIDgdTBJ/story.html>.

listened to.”<sup>90</sup> She also explains how easier it is for women of color to be discredited by white powerful men than white women (Hayek, Graham). This shows the racial gap between white and black victims, who feel the #MeToo movement was stolen from them as many mainstream media “credited Milano, a white actress, with creating the movement.”<sup>91</sup> Even though the creation of #MeToo was later been attributed to Tarana Burke, black women would still feel alienated from it. But as the R Kelly scandal unfolded, their voices finally began to be heard.

Another factor put some victims aside of the #MeToo movement: that of class. The issue of class in this context is detailed by journalist Charisse Jones in an article published by *USA Today*.<sup>92</sup> It is true that the original context of #MeToo was set in Hollywood, where internationally famous singers and actresses were coming forward by accusing high-profile men of sexual abuse. Though the hashtag was also used by unknown victims, some of them, especially women from poor backgrounds and from the working class, did not feel that the media was interested in their stories as much as those of celebrities or the wealthy ones. In the same *USA Today* article, the journalist shares California Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez’s opinion on the subject: “my concern is that if we don’t tackle the issues that low-wage women

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<sup>90</sup> Salma Hayek. “Salma Hayek Says Harvey Weinstein Only Responded to Her and Lupita Nyong’o’s Harassment Claims Because Women of Color Are Easier to Discredit”, by Stuart Oldham, *Variety*, 13 May 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/salma-hayek-says-harvey-weinstein-only-responded-to-her-and-lupita-nyongos-harassment-claims-because-women-of-color-are-easier-to-discredit-1202808828/>

<sup>91</sup> Alanna Vagianos. “Tarana Burke Tells Black Women Me Too Is ‘Your Movement, Too.’” *Huffington Post*, 10 Sept. 2018. *Huff Post*, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/tarana-burke-tells-black-women-me-too-is-your-movement-too\\_us\\_5b967c8fe4b0162f472f65f6](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/tarana-burke-tells-black-women-me-too-is-your-movement-too_us_5b967c8fe4b0162f472f65f6).

<sup>92</sup> Charisse Jones. “When Will MeToo Become WeToo? Some Say Voices of Black Women, Working Class Left Out.” *USA Today*, 30 Jan. 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2018/10/05/metoo-movement-lacks-diversity-blacks-working-class-sexual-harassment/1443105002/>.

workers face (...) they're going to continue to be left behind by this movement.”<sup>93</sup> She implies that more needs to be done to protect women workers from sexual abuse, because the media will not talk about it. Moreover, these women will not feel the sense of belonging that is supposed to be provided by #MeToo in the way that it was created and defined by Tarana Burke. Gonzalez also argues that the movement should go further than social networks since not everybody has an online account where they can share their stories: "The MeToo movement ... can't just be for women who have a Twitter account” (Gonzalez, Jones). As most of the testimonies of sexual harassment or assault were posted on online platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, one could understand that the victims who do not have an account on these websites could feel left out, as they might not see another way to come forward. Action was thus taken to raise awareness on sexual harassment on lower-wage women workers by the victims themselves. The article written by Charisse Jones gives the example of Kim Lawson, a McDonald’s employee who filed a harassment complaint with ten other employees and helped to organize a one day strike by the company’s employees to denounce the pervasiveness of sexual abuse in international companies. Though many unknown victims felt excluded by the #MeToo movement, it did help them somehow: another association that was born thanks to the rise of #MeToo, Time’s Up, focuses on sexual harassment in the workplace and helps the victims to file complaints and seek justice.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Lorena Gonzalez, interviewed by Charisse Jones. “When Will MeToo Become WeToo? Some Say Voices of Black Women, Working Class Left Out.” *USA Today*

<sup>94</sup> See the Time’s Up website, [https://www.timesupnow.com/about\\_times\\_up](https://www.timesupnow.com/about_times_up)

## **2.2: The Main Trigger of #MeToo: The Weinstein Scandal**

### **2.2.1: Rumors**

“For women in America who come forward with stories of harassment, abuse and sexual assault, there are not two sides to every story, however noble that principle might seem. Women do not get to have a side. They get to have an interrogation. Too often, they are questioned mercilessly about whether their side is legitimate. Especially if that side happens to accuse a man of stature, then that woman has to consider the scrutiny and repercussions she’ll be subjected to by sharing her side.”<sup>95</sup>

This quote perfectly summarizes the struggle of women coming forward to denounce sexual assault. Will I be believed? Will my abuser be punished? Is it my fault? These questions were central to the case that led #MeToo to trend on social media and become a movement: the Weinstein Case.

Before explaining what it is and the impact it has had on feminism, background information needs to be given. Rumors about the sexual advances made by Weinstein on young girls had been going on for years before the scandal was revealed by the *New York Times* on October 5, 2017. Since the 1990s, Hollywood celebrities have intimated what was happening behind closed doors of hotel rooms. In the wake of the revelation of these abuses by the movie producer, a video from 2005 resurfaced, proving that people had been talking about it long before the publication of the *New York Times* article in 2017. In this video, we can hear actress and singer Courtney Love saying “If Harvey Weinstein invites you to a

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<sup>95</sup> Amber Tamblyn. “Opinion | Amber Tamblyn: I’m Done With Not Being Believed”, *The New York Times*, 16 Sept. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/16/opinion/sunday/amber-tamblyn-james-woods.html>.

private party in the Four Seasons, don't go.”<sup>96</sup> She later recalled in a tweet that she was not taken seriously and that she was “eternally banned by CAA for speaking out against Harvey Weinstein.”<sup>97</sup> <sup>98</sup> The fact that people did not believe her at the time shows how protected the Hollywood mogul was for years. Seven years before this remark by Courtney Love, Gwyneth Paltrow, whose career was starting at the time, agreed that Weinstein could “coerce you to do a thing or two.”<sup>99</sup> Paltrow, along with other actresses such as Blake Lively and Jessica Alba, was part of a group called “Harvey’s Girls.” This term was coined in a 2010 article posted on the blog *Pajiba*, which gives reviews on films or television series. In this article published seven years before the *New York Times* article that broke open the scandal, Courtney Enlow declares:

The Harvey Girls are easily spotted. They are all very pretty, often in a rather generic sense. Their instant fame and the push behind them comes seemingly out of nowhere and without any justification in terms of resume or skill set.<sup>100</sup>

She even uses the words “casting couch,” implying that these actresses got to the top after having had sex with Harvey Weinstein – but not always of their free will. Enlow denounces

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<sup>96</sup> “Courtney Love Warns About Harvey Weinstein in 2005 Video” *Youtube*, uploaded by CBS Los Angeles, 16 Oct 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdLdz1zKRFc>

<sup>97</sup> CAA: Creative Artists Agency.

<sup>98</sup> @Courtney. “Although I Wasn’t One of His Victims, I Was Eternally Banned by CAA for Speaking out against #HarveyWeinstein #rape Http://M.Tmz.Com/#!Article/2017/10/14/Courtney-Love-Harvey-Weinstein-2005-Warns-Actresses-Sexual-Harassment/ ...” *Twitter*, 14 Oct. 2017, <https://twitter.com/courtney/status/919271307908284416?lang=fr>.

<sup>99</sup> Gwyneth Paltrow, quoted in Andrew Buncombe. “The Moment Gwyneth Paltrow Hinted at Harvey Weinstein’s True Nature in 1998.” *The Independent*, 12 Oct. 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/gwyneth-paltrow-harvey-weinstein-coercer-letterman-interview-sexual-harassment-allegations-latest-a7997246.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Courtney Enlow. *Harvey’s Girls | The Would-Be Ingenues: Where Are They Now, And What Happened Then*. 21 Dec. 2010, [http://www.pajiba.com/think\\_pieces/harveys-girls-the-wouldbe-ingenues-where-are-they-now-and-what-happened-then.php](http://www.pajiba.com/think_pieces/harveys-girls-the-wouldbe-ingenues-where-are-they-now-and-what-happened-then.php).



Weinstein's objectification of women by saying he picks girls as "pets" to make them "attempted creations." (Enlow) A similar article was published the previous year, in December 2009, on a celebrity gossip blog. In this story, simply entitled "Casting Couch," blogger Elaine Lui tells the story of a powerful movie producer who promises unknown actresses fame in exchange for sex, but who does not keep his promise and picks a new girl to do the same thing to her.<sup>101</sup> Though not giving any name for fear of being sued, it is not hard to know who she is talking about. The story was relayed by many people who ended up guessing the identity of the protagonists: actress Gretchen Mol and of course, Harvey Weinstein.<sup>102</sup> Here, as well as in the article written by Courtney Enlow, the movie producer is depicted as a man who feels entitled enough to use the desperation of young girls for sex and whose main tool to get what he wants is abuse of power:

And then he just cut it off. Told her he could no longer help her. That her body in his bed was no longer required. Which of course only added to her degradation. She tried and tried to offer up more, willing to engage in further depravity, but was only met with rejection. Because he's moved on. He's hunting his next target. (Lui)

This quote as well as the whole article describes Harvey Weinstein as a predatory animal and the young actresses as prey. For years, people had been interpreting this story as that of Gretchen Mol. But as it was a rumor, it went unverified. It was even denied by the main protagonist. In an article she wrote for *the Hollywood Reporter*, Gretchen Mol denied having

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<sup>101</sup> Lui, Elaine. "Casting Couch Blind Item." *Lainey Gossip*, 29 Dec. 2009, <http://www.laineygossip.com/Casting-Couch-blind-item/15504>.

<sup>102</sup> Constance Grady. "Sexual Harassment Rumors against Harvey Weinstein Have Hidden in Plain Sight for Years." *Vox*, 5 Oct. 2017, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/10/5/16431848/harvey-weinstein-sexual-harassment-rumors>.

had sex with Harvey Weinstein to get a role and found this story “bizarre,” “blame-shifting,” and “thinks it is another kind of misogyny.”<sup>103</sup>

As these rumors were not verified or later declared false in some cases, we are thus not sure that everything that is said in these articles or in interviews is a hundred percent true. But as the revelations of Harvey Weinstein’s sexual abuses on actresses unfolded in October 2017 it became hard not to believe them. After the publication of the *New York Times* article and the coming forward of actresses in the wake of this article, the new stories coming out about Weinstein were no longer considered as rumors but as facts.

### **2.2.2: October 2017: The Scandal Breaks Out**

After dealing with the rumors, it is now time to deal with the scandal itself. It started on October 5, 2017, when *the New York Times* published an article detailing the allegations against Harvey Weinstein. This article, written by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, starts by listing poignant testimonies of actresses who were abused or harassed by the producer. It explains Weinstein’s attempt to use bribes to prevent them from talking. The journalists established the common feature of the several accusations: “Women reported to a hotel for what they thought were work reasons, only to discover that Mr. Weinstein, who has been married for most of three decades, sometimes seemed to have different interests.”<sup>104</sup> This common narrative is indeed to be found in most of the testimonies shared by the Weinstein

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<sup>103</sup> Gretchen Mol. “Gretchen Mol Breaks Silence on Harvey Weinstein and Misogynistic Rumors (Guest Column).” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 10 Oct. 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/gretchen-mol-breaks-silence-harvey-weinstein-misogynistic-rumors-guest-column-1047418>.

<sup>104</sup> Jodi Kantor, and Megan Twohey. “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.” *The New York Times*, 5 Oct. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html>.

accusers for *the New York Times* or on social media. The following sentences explain what happened to actress Ashley Judd, one of the most famous of his accusers:

Two decades ago, the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein invited Ashley Judd to the Peninsula Beverly Hills hotel for what the young actress expected to be a business breakfast meeting. Instead, he had her sent up to his room, where he appeared in a bathrobe and asked if he could give her a massage or she could watch him shower, she recalled in an interview. (Kantor & Twohey)

This disturbing report echoes others that were shared in other newspapers and magazines. It is similar to that of model and actress Cara Delevingne:

As soon as we were alone he began to brag about all the actresses he had slept with and how he had made their careers and spoke about other inappropriate things of a sexual nature. He then invited me to his room. (...) I swiftly got up . . . I said again that I had to leave. He walked me to the door and stood in front of it and tried to kiss me on the lips. I stopped him and managed to get out of the room.<sup>105</sup>

In both cases as well as in other testimonies, Harvey Weinstein is described as a sexual assaulter who considers women as objects and who abuses his power. The *New York Times* article quotes lines from a memo written by another victim of Weinstein, former employee Lauren O'Connor. She confirms the abuse of power exerted by her former boss: "I am a 28-year old woman trying to make a living and a career. Harvey Weinstein is a 64-year-old, world famous man and this is his company. The balance of power is me: 0, Harvey Weinstein: 10." (O'Connor) Though shocking, the content of the revelations is not the only appalling

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<sup>105</sup> Cara Delevingne, in Desta, Yohana, and Hillary Busis. "These Are the Women Who Have Accused Harvey Weinstein of Sexual Harassment and Assault." *Vanity Fair HWD*, 12 Oct 2017, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/10/harvey-weinstein-accusers-sexual-harassment-assault-rose-mcgowan-ashley-judd-gwyneth-paltrow>.

thing about the scandal. What is also striking is the high number of women who have been given this treatment. An article published by *USA Today* reports that 87 women came forward with accusations against Harvey Weinstein. This article is a list of these women, detailing how they were abused by Weinstein. It contains the names of eighty more or less famous women, and seven names of anonymous accusers. Their declarations confirm the idea of a common narrative explained in the *New York Times* story:<sup>106</sup> Weinstein organizing a meeting in a hotel with aspiring actresses, exposing himself to them or sexually harassing and assaulting them and blackmailing them by saying that he can make them famous if they agree to have sexual intercourse with him.<sup>107</sup>

The article from the *New York Times* that revealed the Weinstein case to the world exposed another shocking issue, which is how Harvey Weinstein got away with his crimes. The very title of the piece reveals this fact: “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.” Its authors Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey give the results of the investigation into the Weinstein company. According to them Weinstein reached settlements with eight of his victims (Kantor & Twohey). They give the example of a young Italian model and actress, Ambra Battilana Gutierrez, who was sexually assaulted by Harvey Weinstein in 2015. She called the police after he grabbed her breast and tried to touch her under her skirt. An agreement was thus made by Weinstein’s lawyers to prevent her from going to the court or talking to the press and from publishing an audio recording she took a few days after the sexual assault. In this audio recording we can clearly hear the young girl saying how

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<sup>106</sup> See page 48.

<sup>107</sup> Sara Moniuszko, and Cara Kelly. “Harvey Weinstein Scandal: A Complete List of the 87 Accusers.” *USA Today*, 1 June 2018, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2017/10/27/weinstein-scandal-complete-list-accusers/804663001/>.

uncomfortable she is feeling and Weinstein admitting he groped her.<sup>108</sup> The incident between the 22-year-old model and the movie mogul and what happened next is clearly detailed in a long article published by *The New Yorker*. The author, Ronan Farrow, explains that Harvey Weinstein conducted a counter-investigation on her victim by hiring lawyers to investigate her sexual past. According to him, the fight was already won: he had a network of lawyers and firms who were closely connected to the Manhattan District Attorney and who convinced him not to bring any charges against Weinstein. (Farrow) They tackled the last problem remaining in this case, the recording of the conversation between Weinstein and Gutierrez, by having her sign a contract with many conditions. Interviewed by Ronan Farrow, the victim shares her feelings about this contract: “I didn’t even understand almost what I was doing with all those papers...The moment I did it, I really felt it was wrong” (Gutierrez, Farrow). We thus understand that she was not totally consenting to the signing of this contract. She was probably manipulated, and the victim of yet one more abuse of power by Weinstein whose attorneys and himself took advantage of her low level of English to have her sign papers she did not even understand: “I was really disoriented. My English was very bad. All of the words in that agreement were super difficult to understand. I guess even now I can’t really comprehend everything” (Gutierrez). This kind of contract was not only signed by the Italian model, but by many other women whose signatures helped Weinstein elude the sexual harassment allegations. The *New York Times* article declares that similar agreements were made with Weinstein’s former employee Lauren O’Connor, who wrote a memo denouncing

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<sup>108</sup> Ambra Battilana Gutierrez, in an audio recording published in Ronan Farrow. “Harvey Weinstein’s Secret Settlements.” *New Yorker*, Nov. 2017 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/harvey-weinsteins-secret-settlements>.

his flagrant abuse of power,<sup>109</sup> and who withdrew her complaint after signing the agreement, or actress Rose McGowan, one of the first accusers of Harvey Weinstein.

Though Harvey Weinstein managed to avoid being convicted of these crimes by signing agreements with his accusers for almost two decades, it all ended after everything was made public. His career ended soon after the beginning of the scandal: another article published by the *New York Times* on October 8, three days after the article detailing the allegations against Weinstein reports that he was fired from the company he co-founded with his brother, Bob Weinstein.<sup>110</sup> This article was written by Megan Twohey, the woman who co-wrote the first article on the scandal. She explains that the decision of the board to fire Weinstein had been made after Democratic figures, many Hollywood actors and actresses and women's rights organizations called for his firing. This proves how revolutionary the Harvey Weinstein scandal is. In her story, Twohey quotes executive producer of the popular HBO series "Girls," Jenni Konner, who speaks her mind about these events: "This is the moment we look back on and say, 'That's when it all started to change.'" For her, his firing "is going to scare any man in Hollywood using his power for anything but making movies and television." (Konner, Twohey).

### **2.2.3: Indictment**

The Weinstein case went further than simply ending the movie producer's career. It was taken to courts to make him finally accountable for his crimes. Investigations for alleged sex crimes were opened in New York, Los Angeles, and London, where sexual assaults were

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<sup>109</sup> See p.49.

<sup>110</sup> Twohey, Megan. *Harvey Weinstein Is Fired After Sexual Harassment Reports*. 8 Oct. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/08/business/harvey-weinstein-fired.html>.

said to have taken place.<sup>111</sup> After several months of investigation, Harvey Weinstein surrendered to the New York Police Department on May 25, 2018 and was charged with committing rape and criminal sexual acts. On the next day, he was already released on 1 million dollar bail. This shows how easy it is to avoid prison when you are part of the rich and famous. Though he had to wear a GPS tracker and was thus restricted to travel in the states of New York and Connecticut, he was not in prison (Simon). Yet he was indicted on the charge of “Criminal Sexual Act in the First Degree” with one count dating back to 2004 and two to 2013 according to the official transcripts from the Supreme Court of the State of New York.<sup>112</sup> Though he pleaded not guilty and strongly denied the allegations, he was indicted again in early July 2018 for three additional charges of sexual assault that now amount to six since the first indictment.<sup>113</sup> These charges against Weinstein and the number of women coming forward with accusations of sexual violence led Judge James Burke to allow this case to move forward to trial on December 20, 2018.

The trial date was set May 6, 2019, but was pushed to June 3. Even if the trial is not going to happen before this date, we know that Weinstein intends to plead not guilty, as his lawyer said he was “eager to clear his name.”<sup>114</sup> We will thus have to wait for a few months to know whether justice will finally be made to the victims and whether Weinstein will go to jail.

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<sup>111</sup> Darran Simon. “Harvey Weinstein Indicted on Charges of Rape, Criminal Sexual Act.” *CNN*, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/30/us/harvey-weinstein-indictment/index.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Wess Haubrich. “Weinstein Indicted: Read the Full Document.” *The 405*, 30 May 2018, <https://www.thefourohfive.com/film/article/weinstein-indicted-read-the-full-document-152>.

<sup>113</sup> Levenson, Eric. “Harvey Weinstein Indicted on Three Additional Sex Assault Charges.” *CNN*, 2 July 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/02/us/harvey-weinstein-charges/index.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Benjamin Brafman, Bekiempis, Victoria. “Harvey Weinstein Trial Date Pushed to June.” *Vulture*, 19 Feb. 2019, <https://www.vulture.com/2019/02/harvey-weinstein-case-trial-date-june.html>.

### **2.3. Unacceptable or Illegal Behavior ? A New Assessment of What is Right or Wrong**

All these aspects of the Harvey Weinstein case (the allegations of sexual assault, the fact that he paid women to keep them from speaking out against him and the manipulation he exerted over his victims) and the rise of the #MeToo movement lead us to think again about how to interpret actions and behaviors that are morally reprehensible. To properly understand what distinguishes unacceptability from illegality, these words need to be defined. Generally used in a workplace context, unacceptable behavior is commonly defined as:

Behavior that has created or has the potential to create a risk to a staff member's health and safety. Examples of unacceptable behavior include, but are not limited to:

- bullying
- emotional, psychological or physical violence or abuse
- occupational violence
- coercion, harassment and/or discrimination
- aggressive/abusive behavior
- unreasonable demands and undue persistence
- disruptive behavior.<sup>115</sup>

This short list includes harassment, sexual or not. This kind of behavior was denounced in all feminist waves,<sup>116</sup> and more recently by the #MeToo movement that was triggered by the Weinstein case. It led people to give more thought to how they were behaving at work or how their colleagues were behaving.

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<sup>115</sup> "Unacceptable Behavior in the Workplace, Definition". *Monash University*, no date.  
<https://www.monash.edu/safer-community/problem-behaviour/unacceptable-behaviour-in-the-workplace>

<sup>116</sup> See pages 4-8.



Alone, the word “unacceptable” is defined as something that is “too bad to be accepted, approved of, or allowed to continue.”<sup>117</sup> This definition bears the idea of morality, or immorality, which is central to our subject. Is it considered immoral to sexually harass women at work or in public spaces? Or should it rather be considered as something illegal? Do these notions of immorality/unacceptability and illegality automatically go together or do they differ in many ways? Did the relationship and the distinction between these types of behavior change after #MeToo?

To answer these questions we need to define the second notion, that of illegal behavior. The *Business Dictionary* defines it as “behavior in violation of a law, or contrary to public policy or a fundamental principle of a legal system. It also includes creation of agreements that are prohibited in law.”<sup>118</sup> In other words, illegal behavior is everything that is prohibited by the law.

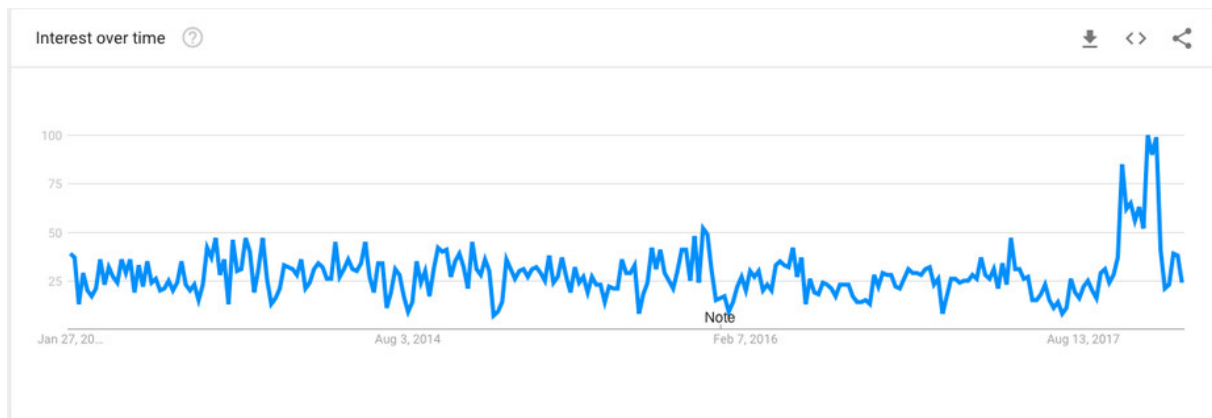
In the wake of #MeToo we are thus more likely to think about these behaviors and to wonder about their differences. These basic definitions help us understand that difference. The first case is more subjective as there is no national law against it. On the contrary, illegal behavior is forbidden by laws that were voted on a national, state, or local level. This distinction can be useful to classify any precise behavior in any of the two categories. As #MeToo rose to the international scale, several articles were written these last few months to help people understand these classifications. For example, an online article published by *Vox*, entitled “The Legal Difference Between Sexual Misconduct, Assault, and Harassment,

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<sup>117</sup> “Unacceptable”, *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/unacceptable>

<sup>118</sup> “Illegal conduct”, *Business Dictionary*, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/illegal-conduct.html>

Explained” details how much explanation is needed, as people started to wonder more and more about what precisely Weinstein was (and still is) accused of.<sup>119</sup>



The numbers shown by this chart are striking: we can notice an increase of Google searches for “What is sexual harassment?” in October, during the Weinstein scandal and the rise of #MeToo. The number 100 shows the peak of interest for this topic, people thus had a rather small interest for sexual harassment before October 2017 (Fernández Campbell).

The *Meriam Webster* dictionary defines sexual harassment as an “uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate (such as an employee or student).”<sup>120</sup> This is what Harvey Weinstein has been accused of by many women. The article published by *Vox* gives a further definition of sexual harassment. It states that to be considered as sexual harassment, the behavior in question must be “unwelcome to be against the law,” and that it is “only prohibited in professional settings” (Fernández Campbell). Sexual harassment is thus a part of the illegal

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<sup>119</sup>Alexia Fernández Campbell, “The Legal Difference between Sexual Misconduct, Assault, and Harassment, Explained.” *Vox*, 25 May 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/26/16901998/weinstein-arrest-sexual-assault-harassment-rape-misconduct>.

<sup>120</sup> “Sexual Harassment”, *Meriam Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexual%20harassment>

behavior category as it is prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and as it is illegal in most states in America. (Fernández Campbell).

Alexia Fernández Campbell distinguishes it from another term defining sexist behaviors: sexual misconduct, which could be linked to unacceptable or immoral behavior. Its legal definition is the following one:

Sexual misconduct encompasses a range of behavior used to obtain sexual gratification against another's will or at the expense of another. Sexual Misconduct includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any conduct of a sexual nature that is without consent, or has the effect of threatening or intimidating the person against whom such conduct is directed.<sup>121</sup>

Sexual misconduct is thus not only about simply inappropriate behavior, it encompasses every sexist behavior from misogynist jokes to sexual harassment, from grabbing a breast or genitals to rape. But not every act of sexual misconduct is illegal and this is why it is so hard for judges to condemn them and for people to describe the smaller gestures as being unacceptable. According to Alexia Fernández Campbell, this confusion between what is legal and what is not contributes to the backlash of #MeToo. She argues that “a lot of the backlash against the #MeToo movement seems centered on a widespread misunderstanding of what, exactly, men are being accused of: is it a crime? A civil violation? Or is it just a sleazy behavior?” This proves how important it is to place sexist behaviors into legal categories.

The last category of sexual misconduct explained in Fernández Campbell's article is the most serious one, sexual assault. Once again this category is a little bit confusing to define and to take to court. The article details the legislation on sexual assault, saying that “sexual

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<sup>121</sup> “Sexual Misconduct”, *US Legal*, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/s/sexual-misconduct/>

assault must involve some physical contact” according to the many articles of the US code.<sup>122</sup> What makes it confusing for the journalist is the difference of legislation per state in what regards groping as it is not considered as a sexual crime in every state (Fernández Campbell). This makes some cases difficult to rule on. This difficulty does apply to the case that launched #MeToo, the Weinstein case. The movie producer was accused by more than eighty women of blackmail, sexual harassment, groping, and even of rape.

This new questioning of behaviors towards women paves the way towards a new society created by the #MeToo movement. This leads us to wonder whether #MeToo did change the society, and, if it is the case, what it changed.

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<sup>122</sup> “10 U.S. Code § 920 - Art. 120. Rape and Sexual Assault Generally.”. *LII / Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School*, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/920>.

### **3. Consequences of #MeToo: A Profound or Superficial Impact in America And The World?**

#### **3.1.Politics: Consequences of #MeToo**

##### **3.1.1: How History Repeats Itself: The Kavanaugh Case**

The Kavanaugh case could be seen as an example of history repeating itself. It has been a reminder of what launched the third wave of feminism in 1991: the Anita Hill case. Attorney Anita Hill testified before the U.S. Senate to denounce Justice Clarence Thomas who allegedly sexually harassed her at work.<sup>123</sup> The Kavanaugh case is very similar to Anita Hill's as they both feature a lower court justice aspiring to become a Supreme Court Judge. But what changes here is the crime involved: Clarence Thomas was accused of having sexually harassed Anita Hill, while Christine Blasey Ford accused Brett Kavanaugh of attempted rape.

This accusation went public on September 14, 2018, when *The New Yorker* published an article detailing the allegations against Brett Kavanaugh. Without first naming the victim, who later became known to everyone as Christine Blasey Ford, the authors explain that she talked to Democratic lawyers to tell them what happened a few days after Kavanaugh was nominated by Donald Trump in early July.<sup>124</sup> According to this article, the victim accused Kavanaugh of forcing himself on her during a party in 1982 when they were both high school students. In a letter she sent to the lawmakers, she explains that Kavanaugh put his hand on

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<sup>123</sup> See pages 6-7.

<sup>124</sup> Ronan Farrow, and Jane Mayer. "A Sexual-Misconduct Allegation Against the Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh Stirs Tension Among Democrats in Congress." *New Yorker*, 14 Sept. 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-sexual-misconduct-allegation-against-the-supreme-court-nominee-brett-kavanaugh-stirs-tension-among-democrats-in-congress>.

her mouth to prevent her from screaming but she managed to escape from the room  
Kavanaugh and his friend were keeping her in.

This story was later told by the victim in person in a testimony before the Senate on September 27, 2018. There, Christine Blasey Ford detailed the events that had haunted her since 1982, the date of the alleged sexual assault. In a trembling voice, she told the audience about the fear she felt at the time, the fear that he was going to rape her or even kill her (Blasey Ford). She also shared how hard, though necessary she felt it was to come forward, even more than thirty years later: "I am here today not because I want to be, I am terrified. I am here because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school."<sup>125</sup> After she gave her emotional testimony, she was asked many questions by the senators on the committee. A lot of these questions were about her recollection of the events and on how sure she was to have been sexually assaulted by Brett Kavanaugh. She answered these questions by saying she was "100 percent sure" of her allegations and that her clearest memory was "the uproarious laughter between the two and their having fun at my expense" (Blasey Ford). Her testimony thus helps us understand the cruelty of her assaulters and how traumatizing this became for the victim.

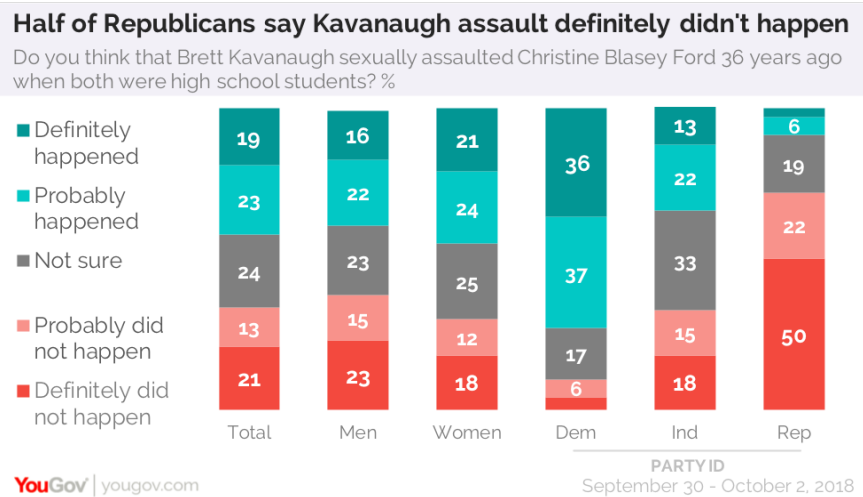
In response to Blasey Ford's statement, Brett Kavanaugh then gave his version of the story. He strongly denied the allegations, saying: "I'm not questioning that Dr. Ford may have been sexually assaulted by some person in some place at some time, but I have never done this to her or to anyone." (Kavanaugh, CNN) He gave an emotional statement, saying that these allegations "destroyed his family" and that he saw them as "a calculated and orchestrated political hit, fueled with apparent pent-up anger about President Trump and the

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<sup>125</sup> Christine Blasey Ford. "Kavanaugh Accuser Testifies to Senate Committee (Full Testimony)" *YouTube*. uploaded by CNN, 27 Sept. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUp5-FRj5-8>.

2016 election.”<sup>126</sup> In other words, he claims the allegations against him were an act of revenge orchestrated by the Democrats because they lost the election.

This claim sums up the divisions in the society provoked by this scandal. More than a feminist issue to fight sexism and sexual harassment, these events have become a partisan issue digging a wider gap between Democrats and Republicans. This has been confirmed by polls in the months following the hearing. Democrats and Republicans disagree on many issues as demonstrated by an article in *The Guardian*. When focusing on the Kavanaugh scandal we learn from this article that Democrats are more likely to believe the woman who was presumably assaulted while Republicans tend to think the victim is lying and to support the alleged abuser.<sup>127</sup> This has been confirmed by polls done by YouGov.



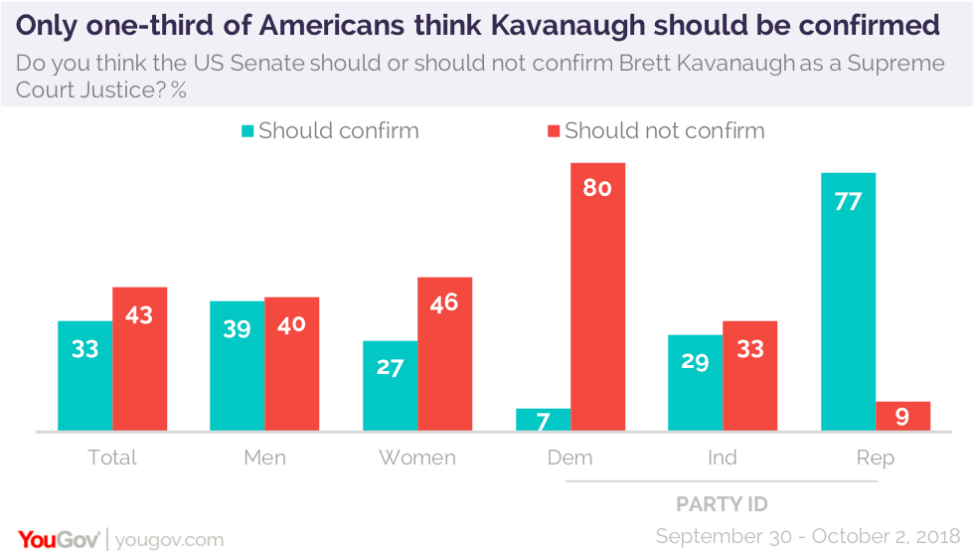
This poll shows that fifty percent of Republicans, do not believe Christine Blasey Ford at all. For another 22% of them it “probably did not happen”. Overall, 72% of them would rather believe a man accused of attempted rape than his victim. The statistics attributed to the

<sup>126</sup> Brett Kavanaugh. “Brett Kavanaugh's Opening statement at Senate Hearing.” *Youtube*, uploaded by CBS News, on 27 Sept 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eahnOcp883k>

<sup>127</sup>Marc Hetherington, Jonathan Weiler. “Why Do Democrats and Republicans See Kavanaugh in Such Different Ways? *The Guardian*, 6 Oct. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/06/democrats-republicans-kavanaugh-polarization>.

Democratic party are nearly reversed: 36% of Democrats think the sexual assault on Dr. Ford definitely happened and 37% think it probably happened. On the contrary, only 6% of liberals believe the allegations are probably false and only 4% think they are definitely false.<sup>128</sup>

Another chart published on the same website shows the percentage of people who think Brett Kavanaugh should be confirmed as a Supreme Court Justice.



Once again there is a clear division between Democrats and Republicans: a huge majority of Democrats, 80% of them, did not want Brett Kavanaugh to be confirmed to the Supreme Court. Only 9% of Republicans thought the same. On the contrary 77% of Republicans thought he should be confirmed compared to only 7 % of Democrats (Frankovic, YouGov).

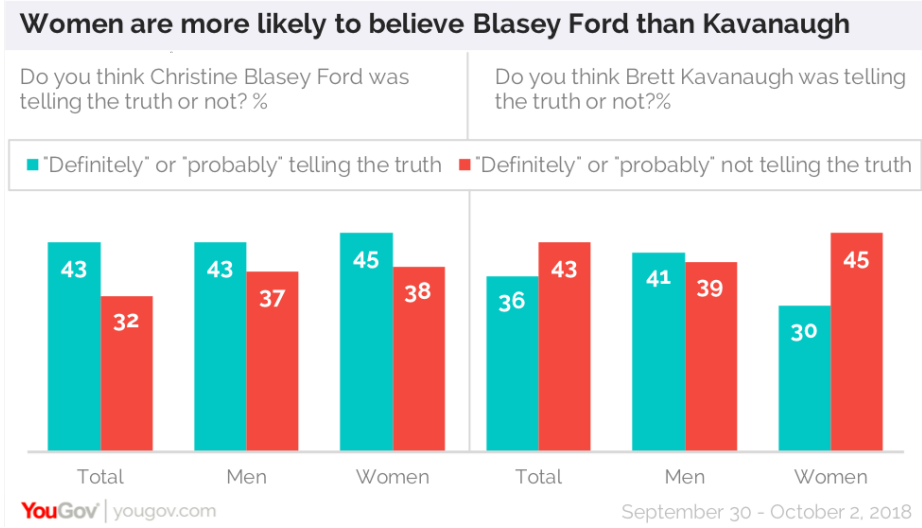
But politics is not the only factor of division on the Kavanaugh issue. Gender has also proven to be a determining factor: the chart seen above shows that women are more likely to

<sup>128</sup> Kathy Frankovic. “After Kavanaugh Hearings, Americans Believe Blasey Ford.” *YouGov*, 3 Oct. 2018, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/10/03/after-kavanaugh-hearings-americans-believe-blasey->.



be against Kavanaugh’s confirmation (46%) against 40% for men. Only 27% of women agree with his becoming a Supreme Court Judge, compared to 39 % of men.

As for believing the victim, the numbers are similar:



According to this chart women are more likely to believe Christine Blasey Ford than her alleged abuser. The numbers show that 45% percent of them declare that the victim is telling the truth when only 30% believe Brett Kavanaugh. Still, 38% percent of women do not believe Blasey Ford but 45% do not believe Kavanaugh. These facts show that women do not always believe the presumed victims of sexual assault and that some would rather believe the man who is accused of that assault. This is a good reminder of the conservative women who decided to vote for Donald Trump in 2016 despite the allegations of sexual misconduct against him.<sup>129</sup> As for men, they are 43% to believe the victim is telling the truth and 37% not to believe her. The number about Brett Kavanaugh are similar: 41% of men believe him when 39% do not.

Opinions regarding this issue were mainly expressed on social media but they were also expressed in the streets: In a protest outside the court where the hearings took place,

<sup>129</sup> See pages 30-35.

women from various backgrounds supported either Christine Blasey Ford or Brett Kavanaugh with strong arguments on both sides. Women who were against Kavanaugh tended to say that victims should be believed and that women's voices should be heard. On the other hand, women supporting Kavanaugh claimed that he had the right to fair treatment thanks to presumption of innocence.<sup>130</sup> Other supporters of Kavanaugh linked it with the #MeToo movement by saying the latter was used politically and that protesting against Kavanaugh's confirmation was disrespectful to the women who really endured sexual assault (Thapar).

#MeToo did play an important role in how people would talk about the Kavanaugh scandal. According to Dara Lind in an article published on *Vox*, Christine Blasey Ford's experience can be seen as a "test of the #MeToo movement."<sup>131</sup> She claims that thanks to #MeToo, women feel more able to speak out and to denounce crimes that were not seen as crimes before and actions that were not considered too unacceptable to be forbidden. For her, we can seriously wonder whether Dr. Ford would have had the courage to denounce her abuser before the United States Senate without #MeToo (Lind). She also says that #MeToo led more people to give credit to women's accusations even when those were targeting a powerful man (Lind).

Though the Kavanaugh case would probably not have existed without the rise of #MeToo on social media and on a national (and international) scale, its outcome reveals that this feminist movement is not perfect. The Kavanaugh scandal also echoes the Anita Hill case in its result. In 2018, as in 1991, the man who was accused of sexual misconduct was

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<sup>130</sup> Aakriti Thapar. "They're Using MeToo Politically" - BBC News." *BBC*, 27 Sept. 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-45661594/brett-kavanaugh-case-they-re-using-metoo-politically>.

<sup>131</sup> Lind, Dara, and Li Zhou. "8 Takeaways From the Knockdown, Drag-Out Fight Over Brett Kavanaugh's Confirmation." *Vox*, 6 Oct. 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/10/6/17941524/kavanaugh-confirmation-takeaways>.

confirmed as a Supreme Court Judge despite these allegations. Though more people believed the victim of Brett Kavanaugh than that of Clarence Thomas, many people still preferred to believe the alleged abuser. Christine Blasey Ford thus became a symbol of the victims whose voice should be heard, and the slogan “I believe Christine Blasey Ford” became a rallying cry for many feminists.

### **3.1.2: The Midterms: A Turning Point for Feminism in Politics.**

In addition to the Kavanaugh case, 2018 witnessed another important step in the history of feminism: the Midterm elections. This election was marked by a series of events that made it become a historical election. From a political point of view, the first significant change in politics was the revenge taken by Democrats on Republicans two years after the defeat of Hillary Clinton against Donald Trump. Indeed, even though the Senate is still controlled by the right-wing party, control of the House of Representatives was regained by the Democrats. Some even talk about a “blue wave” to describe the landslide victory by the left in the House of Representatives: Republicans lost 39 seats to the Democrats in the House.<sup>132</sup> This result is higher than that of former elections. According to an analysis by Nate Silver and Dave Wasserman the margin can be superior or equal to those in former elections that would be considered as waves.<sup>133</sup> This was confirmed by charts published by the CNN in an article that was even entitled “The 2018 Blue Wave.”

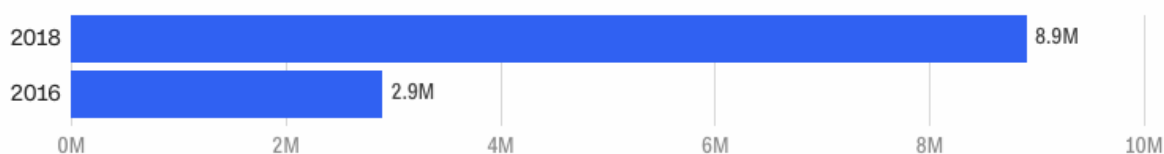
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<sup>132</sup> McCarthy, Sam Levin Tom, et al. “Democrats Secure 218 Seats in Midterms to Win Control of House – as It Happened.” *The Guardian*, 7 Nov. 2018. [www.theguardian.com, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2018/nov/06/us-midterms-elections-2018-latest-live-polls-news-updates-donald-trump-republicans-democrats](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2018/nov/06/us-midterms-elections-2018-latest-live-polls-news-updates-donald-trump-republicans-democrats).

<sup>133</sup>@natesilver538 “For Comparison, the House Popular Vote in Things That Are Widely Considered to Be Wave Elections: 2010: R +6.8 2006: D +8.0 1994: R +7.1 So If We Wind up at ~D +7.5 or so, We’ll Be Pretty Much Exactly in Line with Those Years.”, *Twitter*; 10 Nov. 2018, <https://twitter.com/natesilver538/status/1061293819747057664?lang=fr>.

## Popular vote margin nearly 3x the size of margin in 2016

In 2016 (for President) and 2018 (for Congress) millions more voters supported the Democrat than the Republican.



Source: CNN Election Center  
Graphic: Joyce Tseng, CNN

These numbers show that many more people voted for the Democrats in 2018 than in 2016, with almost three times as many votes in the latest election. It thus allowed the Democrats to take control of the House of Representatives but not the Senate, which is why this idea of the blue wave has been challenged since election day.<sup>134</sup>

However important this Democrat victory has been for American politics this partisan issue will not be our main focus. We will deal more precisely with the dimension of gender in the latest Midterm elections. They were characterized with many victories of female candidates. These victories can be explained by various factors.

It is first important to study the numbers of voter turnout in the election. The 2018 Midterms election broke records in terms of voter turnout. Several articles published on the days following the election gave numbers of people who went to the polls: according to Grace Segers from CBS, they were about 113 million, which corresponds to 49% of eligible voters in America.<sup>135</sup> When compared to those of previous elections, these numbers do break records: Segers explains that the last Midterm elections to count 49% of turnout were those of 1966. In 2014, only 34.6 % of eligible voters participated in the electoral process and 41%

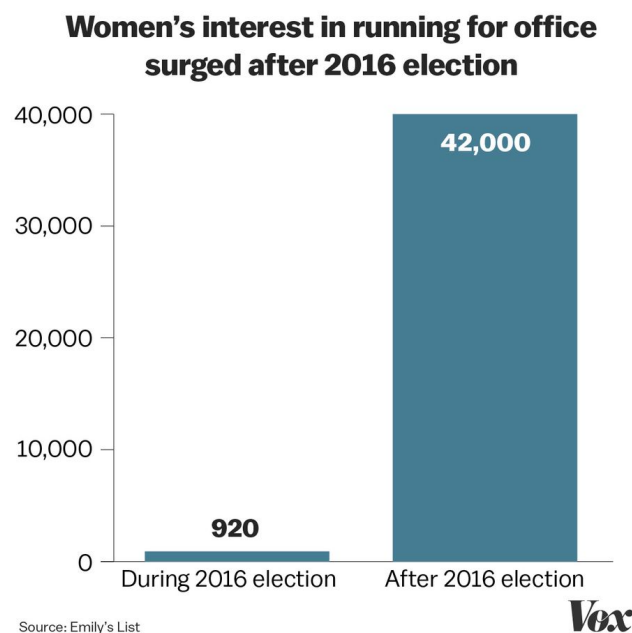
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<sup>134</sup> Z.Byron Wolf and Joyce Tseng. "The 2018 Blue Wave, in 3 Charts." *CNN*, 29 Nov. 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/28/politics/blue-wave-2018/index.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Segers, Grace. *Record Voter Turnout in 2018 Midterm Elections*. *CBS News*, 7 Nov. 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/record-voter-turnout-in-2018-midterm-elections/>.

voted in 2010. Though very high, the 2018 percentage of voters did not break the record set in 1914 which is the only year when more than 50% of voters went to the polls (Segers).

This turnout can be explained by women’s main motivation to vote, which is the strong disappointment they felt after Donald Trump was elected President. It is true that Donald Trump’s many sexist comments and the fact that he won the 2016 election despite these comments disgusted many women. These feelings thus motivated them to massively vote for Democratic candidates and women.<sup>136</sup> The same could be said about the women who run for office: “Many of them did so in reaction to President Trump.”<sup>137</sup>



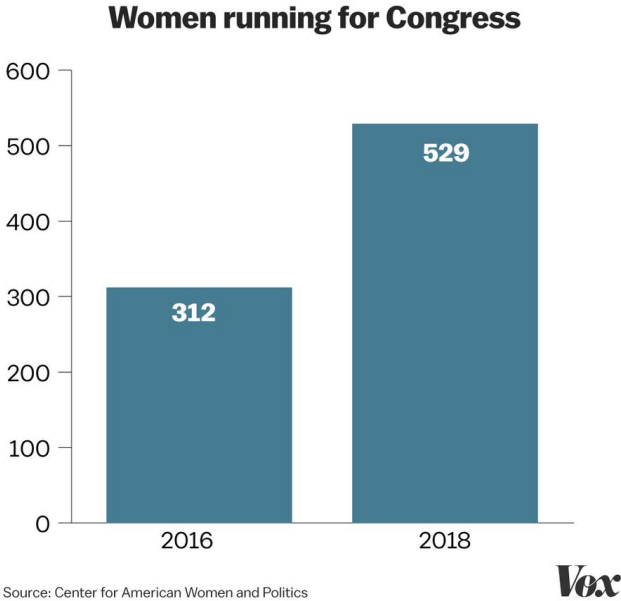
This poll conducted by the feminist organization EMILY’S List shows the huge difference between women’s interest in running for office during the presidential election and the MidTerms. In 2016, only 920 women were interested in running for office. This number rose

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<sup>136</sup> Jill Filipovic. “Women Won Big Last Night. Now It’s Time to Get to Work.” *Marie Claire*, 7 Nov. 2018, <https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a24790266/female-wins-midterms-2018-what-to-do-next/>.

<sup>137</sup> Jill Filipovic. “Opinion | The Thrill of a Women’s Wave - The New York Times.” *New York Times*, 7 Nov. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/07/opinion/women-wave-midterms-victory.html>.

to 42,000 after the election.<sup>138</sup> It is likely to increase in the future as women have gained more confidence thanks to feminist movements and the assumption that if Trump could have been elected they would be able to as much. (Filipovic, “The Thrill of a Women’s Wave) The number of women actually running for office increased as well:



In 2016, 312 women were candidates to be elected in Congress. In the Mid Terms elections of 2018, this number rose to 529 candidates, according to this chart published on *Vox* (Zhou).

The other revolutionary aspect of the latest American election is the important role played by women of color. Also motivated by the victory of a racist and sexist candidate in the presidential election, women of color went massively to the polls and like female candidates in general, felt more confident to run for office (Filipovic). Moreover, many women of color who ran for office won. Among them is a majority of African-American candidates as 400 of them ran in the Midterms.<sup>139</sup> The winners include Ayanna Priestley, the

<sup>138</sup> Li Zhou. “12 Charts That Explain the Record-Breaking Year Women Have Had in Politics.” *Vox*, 6 Nov. 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/6/18019234/women-record-breaking-midterms>.

<sup>139</sup> Packnett, Brittany. “Over 400 Black Women Are Running in the MidTerms. Meet 5 Who Could Help Make History.” *The Cut*, 2 Nov. 2018, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/11/stacey-abrams-lauren-underwood.html>.

first black U.S representative in Massachusetts, Jahana Hayes, the first African-American to represent Connecticut in Congress and Lauren Underwood, an newly-elected Illinois representative who was the youngest black woman running for this election.<sup>140</sup>

Hispanic women also won several races in the 2018 elections. The year 2018 was even nicknamed “The year of the Latina” by the organization EMILY’s List, as record numbers of Latinas led campaigns for Congress. And according to the committee’s website this phenomenon will repeat in future elections: “When girls see themselves represented in public office, they’re more likely to consider running for office themselves.”<sup>141</sup> This statement is applicable to women in general as they feel more and more confident to run.<sup>142</sup> Among the winners are Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, the youngest women to have ever been elected in Congress and Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia, the first Latinas to be elected to Congress.

Other ethnicities were represented among the winners: for the first time ever, two Muslim women were elected to Congress: Ilhan Omar from Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib from Michigan. As for Native Americans, Deb Haaland won seats for New Mexico and Sharice Davids for Kansas. The latter is also the first LGBTQ Kansas representative. Asian-American women also won several seats such as Stephanie Murphy for Florida or Grace Meng in New York. (Busch)

As a whole, women won 36 new seats against only 24 in 1992. As for female incumbents who were reelected, they were 66 in 2018 and only half this number 26 years ago.

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<sup>140</sup> Monica Busch. “Women Of Color Candidates Held Their Ground In 2018 — And Gained Some, Too.” *Bustle*, <https://www.bustle.com/p/women-of-color-who-won-in-the-2018-midterm-elections-held-their-ground-gained-some-too-13096026>.

<sup>141</sup> Jess McIntosh. “2018 Is the Year of the Latina.” *Emily’s List*, Nov. 2018, <https://emilyslist.org/news/entry/2018-is-the-year-of-the-latina>.

<sup>142</sup> See page 69.

The result of these many victories is that the House of Representatives now counts more than 100 women.<sup>143</sup>

The outcome of the Midterm election renewed hope to women to finally be successful in politics. But in spite of the many seats won by women, they are still underrepresented in Congress: according to Jill Filipovic, women still make up only a quarter of all the members of Congress (Filipovic, “Thrill”) This is even worse for women of color, who represent the biggest minority in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. According to EMILY’s List, “There are just as many dudes named Steve serving in Congress as there are Latinas.” (McIntosh) This is why specialists recommend being careful about women’s representation in politics. “It’s crucial we don’t fall into the too-common trap of women’s representation: Seeing a few more women in the room and concluding that we’ve reached equality.” (Filipovic, “Women Won Big Last Night”) Here, Filipovic reminds us that equality is still unachieved, and that most decision-makers are still men.

Though women did not reach full equality with the Midterm elections, the results proved that it is possible. Events such as Donald Trump’s election and undoubtedly #MeToo have given more confidence to women about their ability to run for office and win.

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<sup>143</sup> Lu, Denise, and Keith Collins. “Year of the Woman” Indeed: Record Gains in the House”. *New York Times*, 16 Nov. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/09/us/women-elected-midterm-elections.html>



### **3.1.3: Rise of New Feminist Forces in Politics.**

Over these past few years, the hope for women to thrive in the political field was characterized by the rise of feminist symbols in politics. The latest Midterm elections witnessed the victories of many female candidates. Among them, one has gained international prominence in just a few months: Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. Elected to the House of Representatives from the state of New York, she is the youngest woman ever to be elected to Congress. Her story is the example of a self-made woman: she was a waitress only a few months ago and she is now sitting in Congress. She is clearly seen by many as a rising feminist force in Washington D.C. She has never hidden her feminist opinions either on social media or during her campaign, even after she was elected. In July 2018, four months before her election, she posted the following message on Instagram: “Ultimately feminism is about women choosing the destiny that they want for themselves.”<sup>144</sup> This idea was also expressed on her campaign’s website: like Hillary Clinton, she links women’s rights to human rights, and puts emphasis on reproductive rights and equal pay.<sup>145</sup>

What also made her popular these past few months is her courage to stand up to white powerful men with strong arguments. Her interventions in Congress to speak her opinion on issues such as corruption and environmental rights went viral on social media. She is seen as a courageous young woman who is not afraid of standing for what she thinks is right and of making her voice heard.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez sur Instagram : 🌈 by @kimothyjoy, quote from interview with @cooties.zine last year. Support your local artists & zines! Thank you. 💜.” *Instagram*, 12 July 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIHFpNflhB3/>.

<sup>145</sup> See Alexandria Ocasio Cortez’s campaign website, <https://ocasio2018.com/issues>

<sup>146</sup> Lee Kong, Stacy. “12 Days of Feminists: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.” *Flare*, 21 Dec. 2018, <https://www.flare.com/celebrity/amber-tamblyn-feminist/>.

Another female politician who has become popular after the Midterms is the House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi. She has inspired many feminists in America, as she was the first woman to ever be elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives. “In many ways, Nancy Pelosi is the original Badass Woman of Washington.”<sup>147</sup> By saying this, journalist Dana Bash agrees with the fact that Pelosi is a feminist and explains how in an article published by the CNN. According to her, Pelosi’s feminism is to be found in how she got to the top, “excelling in a man’s world.” (Bash) In an interview with Dana Bash, Pelosi shares some sexist experiences she has had to endure during her political ascension. For example, she declares that a woman who is effective is seen as a threat by male politicians (Pelosi, Bash). This idea was also expressed by Hillary Clinton in her book, *What Happened*.<sup>148</sup> In addition to denouncing the sexism in politics, she stands for her fellow female counterparts, by encouraging women with young children to run for office for better representation (Pelosi, Bash). She has recently made the headlines by standing against President Trump on the issue of funding the wall at the Mexican border, by making him yield to end the shutdown a few months ago in January.

California Senator Kamala Harris, also emerged in past few months as a feminist politician. She gave her opinions on issues that have shaped today’s feminism, such as the Kavanaugh scandal. She publicly stood for Christine Blasey Ford, saying that sexual assault is an issue that needs to be dealt with, and encouraging victims to come forward: "Do not be discouraged, because there are more of us who will create and provide a safe space for them

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<sup>147</sup> Dana Bash. “Pelosi: ‘I Want Women to See That You Do Not Get Pushed Around.’” *CNN*, 13 Nov. 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/13/politics/nancy-pelosi-badass-women-washington/index.html>.

<sup>148</sup> See page 23.

to come forward, and those that will not.”<sup>149</sup> Harris also reacted to the #MeToo movement by expressing her wish to help victims of sexual harassment. In July 2018, she introduced a bill called EMPOWER Act.

If the #MeToo conversation ends without a meaningful change in our laws, then we will have failed not only the courageous women who have come forward, but also the next generation of women who will enter the workplace. Today, I introduced the #EMPOWER Act.<sup>150</sup>

The EMPOWER Act stands for “Ending the Monopoly of Power Over Workplace harassment through Education and Reporting.”<sup>151</sup> In other words, the bill’s aim is to make it easier for victims to come forward when harassed at work (Holter). The goals of the bill are to “outlaw non-disparagement and non-disclosure agreements in employee contracts, require public companies to disclose settlements, establish a confidential tip-line for reporting, and reform the tax code to ensure survivors aren’t penalized” (Holter). This bill is one of the positive impacts of #MeToo and makes Kamala Harris, one of its introducers, a hope for feminists to finally help victims of sexual assault.

On January 21, 2019, Harris announced her candidacy for the 2020 presidential election. If she is nominated by her party, she could be the first woman of color to be so close

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<sup>149</sup> John Verhovek. “In a Glimpse of 2020, Kamala Harris Connects with Female Supporters in Iowa.” *ABC News*, 26 Oct. 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/glimpse-2020-kamala-harris-connects-female-supporters-iowa/story?id=58754888>.

<sup>150</sup> @senkamalaharris. “If the #MeToo Conversation Ends without a Meaningful Change in Our Laws, Then We Will Have Failed Not Only the Courageous Women Who Have Come Forward, but Also the next Generation of Women Who Will Enter the Workplace. Today, I Introduced the #EMPOWER Act. <https://Bzfd.It/2Jn0M5u>.” *Twitter*, 2018T00:14, <https://twitter.com/senkamalaharris/status/1004109264221343744>.

<sup>151</sup> Lauren Holter. “What Is the EMPOWER Act? This Workplace Harassment Bill Could Make NDAs A Thing Of The Past.” *Bustle*, 17 July 2018, <https://www.bustle.com/p/what-is-the-empower-act-this-workplace-harassment-bill-could-make-ndas-a-thing-of-the-past-9792924>.

to winning the White House. She is already seen as a direct threat to Donald Trump, in complete opposition with his views on racial and gender equality.

The last feminist force we are going to talk about is Michelle Obama. First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017, she was very popular during her husband's presidency and she still is today. Her latest book, entitled *Becoming* and published last year, broke sales records: it had already been sold more than two million copies in the first two weeks.<sup>152</sup> These high numbers shows the popularity of Michelle Obama, which also comes from the many important issues she has been support since Barack Obama was elected president: obesity, bullying and, of course, feminism. Michelle Obama is supporting many feminist causes. For instance, one of the main causes of her legacy is the education of girls around the world. In 2015, she launched an initiative called "Let Girls Learn" which aims to provide more education to girls in war zones and provide them security on their way to school and hygiene so that they can go to school everyday.<sup>153</sup> In addition to visiting girls who need education in poor countries, she uses her influence to fight this issue: "I plan to keep urging world leaders to invest in their potential and create societies that truly value them as human beings. I plan to keep reaching out to local leaders, families, and girls themselves to raise awareness about the power of sending girls to school." (Obama) She also created the Global Girls Alliance through the Obama Foundation, the purpose of which is also to give more power to young girls across the world to help them become citizens and achieve their life goals.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> BBC. "Michelle Obama's Memoir *Becoming* Breaks Sales Record in 15 Days." *BBC*, 30 Nov. 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46407734>.

<sup>153</sup> Obama, Michelle. "Let Girls Learn." *The Atlantic*, 2 Nov. 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/girls-education-michelle-obama/413554/>.

<sup>154</sup> Global Girls Alliance. "Welcome to the Global Girls Alliance." *Obama Foundation*, <https://www.obama.org/globalgirlsalliance/about/>.

She also proudly gave her support to #MeToo. She expressed the need for this feminist movement by stating how women are treated in today's world. "Enough is enough. The world is a, sadly, dangerous place for women and girls, and we see that again and again. Young women are tired of it. They're tired of being undervalued, they're tired of being disregarded, they're tired of their voices not being invested in and heard."<sup>155</sup> For her, #MeToo will ignite change for the next generations.

These views made her so popular that according to a survey taken by PerryUdem on sexism and inequalities between men and women, 47% consider Michelle Obama as the best representative of feminism, just ahead of Oprah Winfrey (43%) and Hillary Clinton (41%).<sup>156</sup> Many of her supporters even wished to see her run for president in 2020, but she recently said she did not want to run but every woman, including her daughter, could.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Michelle Obama, "Michelle Obama On #MeToo: "Women Are Tired Of Being Undervalued" | uploaded by TODAY, *YouTube*, 11 Oct. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxvbO95EYQY>.

<sup>156</sup> PerryUnderm. "PerryUdem Gender Equality Report." *Scribd*, 2017, <https://fr.scribd.com/document/336804316/PerryUdem-Gender-Equality-Report>.

<sup>157</sup> Jayme Deerwester. "Michelle Obama Talks 2020 Trump Challengers, Gives Update on Malia and Sasha." *Usatoday*, 13 Nov. 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2018/11/13/michelle-obama-2020-trump-challenger-not-me-but-maybe-sasha/1986129002/>.

## **3.2. Changes in the Society**

### **3.2.1. What Did #MeToo change for men?**

Though #MeToo was essentially run by women and most testimonies came from women, it is not an only female movement. Men were also welcomed to come forward with sexual assault allegations. The high number of people coming forward made #MeToo a global movement that made headlines everywhere. As a consequence most people have an opinion about the movement, even those who have never been assaulted. This part will thus focus on the impact #MeToo had on men who represent the majority of people accused of sexual assault and harassment.

In response to #MeToo, some men have tried to reflect on their past behaviors to change them for the better. A survey taken by FiveThirtyEight reports the numbers of men who decided to change how they behave around women in the wake of #MeToo. In the category of men aged from 18 to 34 years old, only 23% stated they had changed their behavior around women, against 77% who have not.<sup>158</sup> In the context of relationships, 88% percent say #MeToo did not change anything in their way of life, against only 13% who say it did. In intimate relationships, 15% worry they may have pushed their partner too far (Pelletiere).

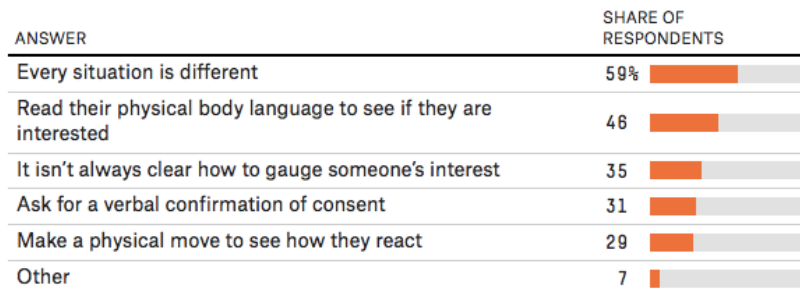
The idea of consent is essential in #MeToo as well as in its perception by men: a sexual relationship without consent from both parties *is* sexual assault, as has been underscored by #MeToo.<sup>159</sup> The following chart published by FiveThirtyEight shows how men react in intimate relationships after #MeToo:

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<sup>158</sup> Nicole Pelletiere. “Has #MeToo Changed Men? Guys Respond to the Movement and How They Feel about Masculinity.” *ABC News*, 20 June 2018, <https://goodmorningamerica.com/family/story/metoo-changed-men-guys-respond-movement-feel-masculinity-55971752>.

<sup>159</sup> See pages 55-59.

### When you want to be physically intimate with someone, how do you gauge their interest?



Among 1,615 adult men surveyed May 10-22, 2018. Respondents were asked to select all options that applied to them.

SOURCE: FIVETHIRTYEIGHT/DEATH, SEX & MONEY/SURVEYMONKEY

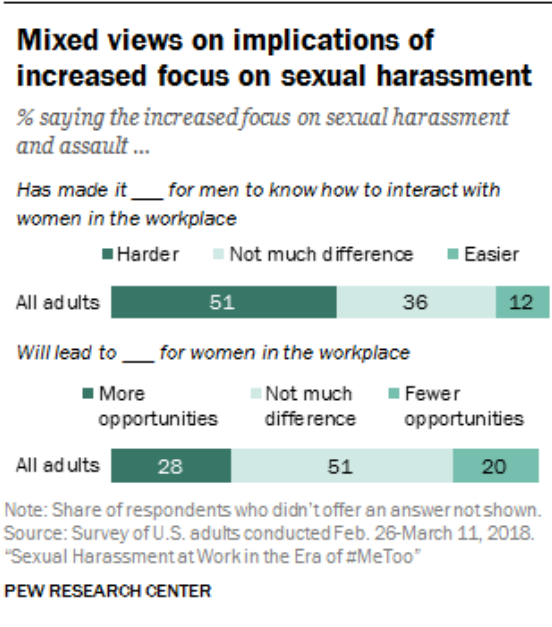
A large majority failed to precisely answer the question, saying that “every situation is different,” meaning it is difficult to be sure that their partner totally agrees to the sexual intercourse. 48% read their partner’s body language to check their consent. As for verbally asking for consent, it is done by only 31% of the people asked.<sup>160</sup>

In the workplace, male behaviors are also changing: 66% of men have heard of #MeToo and 34% of them decided to be more respectful to women, as explained by *Bloomberg*.<sup>161</sup> One third out of 1000 executives adjusted their behavior to avoid being accused of sexual harassment (Greenfield). Human resources consultant Sharon Sellers agrees in the same article that “There are executives who are being more cautious about what they’re saying and what is said in the workplace” (Sellers, Greenfield). But she denounces the fact that this good intention can easily drift from its main goal: some men prefer to put women aside and do not dare to include them in professional decisions. Others said they “wouldn’t

<sup>160</sup> Ella Koeze, Anna Maria Barry-Jester. “What Do Men Think It Means To Be A Man?” *FiveThirtyEight*, 20 June 2018, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-do-men-think-it-means-to-be-a-man/>.

<sup>161</sup> Rebecca Greenfield. “Powerful Men Have Changed Their Behavior at Work Since #MeToo.” *Bloomberg*, 4 Oct. 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-04/powerful-men-have-changed-their-behavior-at-work-since-metoo>.

get into an elevator alone with a woman” (Greenfield). The *Bloomberg* article also refers to a survey taken by SHRM which gives the following numbers: 45% of men have not changed their behavior towards women at work, while 21% performed small changes. 24% of male workers admitted to being more careful with their language and 9% no longer touch female employees, fearing to be accused of sexual assault (SHRM). Some men thus see interaction with women to be harder since the rise of #MeToo which increased the focus on sexual harassment.



This chart made by the Pew Research Center indicates that 51% of men think that #MeToo has made it harder for them to interact with women co-workers when 36% see no difference with how it was before 2017. Only 12% think communication with women is easier thanks to #MeToo. As for women’s opportunities, a majority of men think #MeToo will not make a real difference and 28% say it will give them more opportunities on the professional level. On the contrary, 20% of them say women will have fewer opportunities.<sup>162</sup> This shows how mixed an opinion men have on #MeToo.

<sup>162</sup> Nikki Graf. “Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo.” *Pew Research Center*, 4 Apr. 2018, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/04/04/sexual-harassment-at-work-in-the-era-of-metoo/>.



As a consequence, smaller trends have emerged as a categorization of men's responses to #MeToo. These trends are explained in an article written by Todd Essig and published in *Forbes*. #BeKinder is one of the most feminist ones. Valuing empathy to reach equality and inclusion, it puts more emphasis on understanding women's experiences to believe them.<sup>163</sup> According to the author who coined these hashtags "it's all about men not letting their sexual impulses blind them to women's experience, to their rights to the same sexual agency they have" (Essig). The second response described by Essig is as feminist as the first one. #BeBetter is about male self-improvement: men take responsibility for their actions and behaviors towards women. It means that they won't blame women for being sexually harassed or assaulted, but only blame themselves for their own actions (Essig). The third type of change in men's behaviors after #MeToo is #ImDone. This one is about behaviors in intimate relationships: sexually active men try to adjust their sexual life for it to be more conventional to avoid misunderstandings from their partners (Essig). They see this change as a mark of respect for women. The last one, #ImOut, is much more radical than the others. The men who responded to #MeToo with #ImOut decided to stop having sexual relationships with women out of fear of being accused of sexual assault. According to Essig, they would rather go towards technology and robotics for sex, rather than actual women to avoid having problems. As technology develops more and more everyday, this practice is likely to develop in the future as well (Essig).

Essig talks about another response to #MeToo, which, according to him, is "not worthy of a hashtag." This last category is the incels. They call themselves "involuntary celibates." They blame women for their lack of sexual activity, and cannot tolerate women

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<sup>163</sup> Todd Essig. "4 Ways Straight Men Are Responding To #MeToo." *Forbes*, 28 May 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/toddessig/2018/05/28/4-ways-straight-men-are-responding-to-metoo/>.

who say “no” to them. Elliot Rodger, an incel who made the headlines in 2014 after killing six people, justified his misogynistic thoughts by saying that “the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me.”<sup>164</sup> Essig links that state of mind with toxic masculinity, and we can easily agree with him. Indeed these men think they are superior to women and deprive them of sexual agency (Essig). They see feminism as a threat to their sexual satisfaction and thus used violence to take revenge against women who refused to yield. The terrorist attack in Toronto in 2018 is the perfect example of incel violence: a member of the community killed ten people allegedly because of his frustration.

The various responses to #MeToo prove that it has not unified everybody, despite its aim to do so. A lot of men, and even women, still do not agree with it or did not change their behavior for the better, which shows that the movement’s impact is limited.

### **3.2.2. Creation Of Other Movements: Time’s Up**

The impact of the #MeToo movement can be also seen through the creation of sub-movements focusing on specific areas of feminism, such as Time’s Up. Time’s Up was started with an open letter published on January 1st, 2018. It was signed by 300 prominent women in Hollywood, from actresses to producers such as Eva Longoria, Reese Witherspoon or Shonda Rhimes. Its main focus is to help working-class women by fighting against sexual harassment in the workplace to make them safer:

TIME’S UP is an organization that insists on safe, fair and dignified work for women of all kinds. We want women from the factory floor to the floor of the Stock

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<sup>164</sup> Amia Srinivasan. “Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?” *London Review of Books*, 22 Mar. 2018, pp. 5–10. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n06/amia-srinivasan/does-anyone-have-the-right-to-sex>.

Exchange, from child care centers to C-suites, from farm fields to the tech field, to be united by a shared sense of safety, fairness and dignity as they work and as we all shift the paradigm of workplace culture.<sup>165</sup>

Time's Up has a specific structure: it has no specific leader and it is led by several groups of volunteers and activists.<sup>166</sup> These groups work on various issues: equality between men and women in the workplace, LGBT rights, or preventing the overuse of non disclosure agreements to silence the victims of sexual assault (Time's Up website), a technique that was often used by Harvey Weinstein.<sup>167</sup>

Action was soon taken by the newly-born organization: Time's Up raised a legal defense fund to help victims of workplace sexism and working women from underprivileged backgrounds. In only 2 months, more than 20 million dollars were donated for these causes.<sup>168</sup> Promotion for the Time's Up fund and of the movement in general was made through public events in Hollywood. A few days after the beginning of the movement, actresses who were attending the Golden Globes were asked to wear black gowns, to raise awareness about all those women who the media do not talk about, middle and lower-class women who the movement is fighting for.

Time's Up thus looks similar to #MeToo in its goals, while focusing on a specific area. However, it is not exactly the same. It has been described by some as a continuation of #MeToo, "as a solution-based, action-oriented next step in the #Metoo movement." (Langone)

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<sup>165</sup> See the organization's website, [https://www.timesupnow.com/about\\_times\\_up](https://www.timesupnow.com/about_times_up)

<sup>166</sup> Cara Buckley. "Powerful Hollywood Women Unveil Anti-Harassment Action Plan." *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/movies/times-up-hollywood-women-sexual-harassment.html>.

<sup>167</sup> See pages 51-52.

<sup>168</sup> Alix Langone. "#MeToo and Time's Up Founders Explain the Difference Between the 2 Movements." *Time*, 22 Mar. 2018, <http://time.com/5189945/whats-the-difference-between-the-metoo-and-times-up-movements/>.

In other words, it goes further than the 2017 movement by taking concrete actions for women in the workplace. Time's Up also slightly differs from #MeToo as it corrects some of its mistakes. One of the criticisms of #MeToo is that it was focusing too much on high-profile accusers and high-profile victims.<sup>169</sup> Time's Up thus tackles the issue of class and poverty, defending Hollywood stars as well as nurses or farmers. Shonda Rhimes, one of the main founders of Time's Up, confirmed this when she asked herself the following question: "If this group of women can't fight for a model for women who don't have as much power and privilege, then who can?" (Rhimes, Buckley).

Despite these very few differences, one cannot deny that Time's Up is a tributary of #MeToo, without which it would probably not have existed. The success of Time's Up led it to create sub organizations focusing on even more precise causes. In early 2019, Time's Up Healthcare was established for more gender equality and less sexual harassment on women who work in the healthcare field, as they represent 80% of workers while most decision-makers are men.<sup>170</sup> A similar organization was born thanks to Time's Up: Time's Up advertising, which helps women in the advertising field.

### **3.2.3. The Fight is Not Over**

Though the #MeToo and Time's Up movements are aimed at reducing the statistics of sexual harassment at work and sexual assault in general, they are still very high. Numbers published just a few months before #MeToo by the *Huffington Post* are striking. According to

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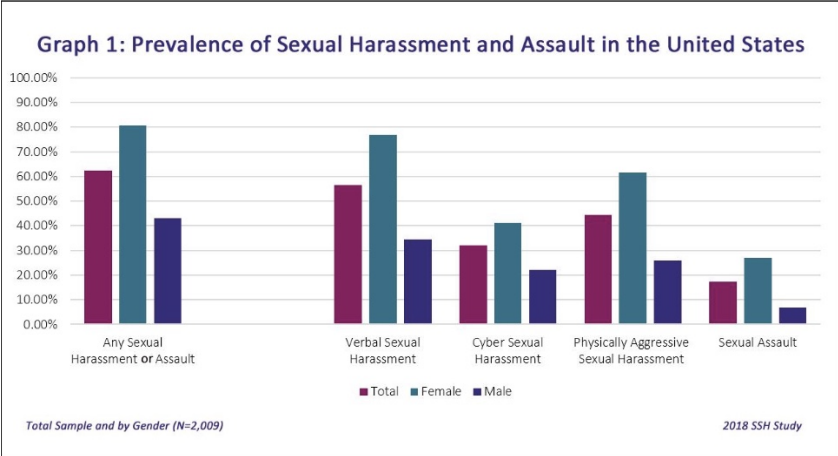
<sup>169</sup> See pages 44-45.

<sup>170</sup> See the Time's Up Healthcare website: [https://www.timesuphealthcare.org/our\\_story](https://www.timesuphealthcare.org/our_story)

the newspaper someone is sexually assaulted every 98 seconds in the United States.<sup>171</sup>

17,700,000 women were raped in less than 20 years and 99% of assaulters walk free (Vagianos). One out of every six women has survived rape or attempted rape. The big majority, 90% of the victims, are women, 94% of whom will suffer PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) after being raped (Vagianos).

These statistics did not change much in a few months – at least on the short term. A report published by Stop Street Harassment explains that 81% of women and 43% of men reported the crime they were subjected to.<sup>172</sup> The report gives numbers for the various types of sexual assault: verbal sexual harassment, which is a form of sexual assault, was undergone by three quarters of women who took the survey (77%) and one third of the men (34%). As for inappropriate touching, it was experienced by half of women and 17% of men.



<sup>171</sup> Alanna Vagianos. “30 Alarming Statistics That Show The Reality Of Sexual Violence In America | HuffPost.” *Huffpost*, 4 May 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sexual-assault-statistics\\_us\\_58e24c14e4b0c777f788d24f](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sexual-assault-statistics_us_58e24c14e4b0c777f788d24f).

<sup>172</sup> Stop Street Harassment. *The Facts Behind the #MeToo Movement: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault*. Feb. 2018, p. 41. <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Full-Report-2018-National-Study-on-Sexual-Harassment-and-Assault.pdf>

This chart published with the study made by Stop Street Harassment shows how many people have experienced sexual assault and different types of sexual harassment in America in 2018. With no surprise, the numbers of women who have been the victim of harassment or assault is the highest in each case; hence the need for feminism. Among the different forms of sexual harassment, verbal sexual harassment is the most prevalent.<sup>173</sup> Physically aggressive sexual harassment comes second, with slightly more than 60% of women and about 25% of men who have been the victims of it. It also lists cyber sexual harassment, with respectively 40% and about 22% of victims.

The impact of #MeToo on statistics can thus hardly be found in the numbers of people who were sexually assaulted. It is rather noticeable in the number of people who reported sexual assault: the numbers of reports for these crimes increased from 23% in 2016 to 40% in 2017.<sup>174</sup> For Karen Weiss, a specialist of crime victimization, #MeToo has marked a “cultural shift” allowing women to gain more “confidence in their ability to be heard.” (Weiss, Milligan). Still, sexual crimes and rape in particular are the most underreported crimes (Milligan).

The rise of #MeToo has allowed thousands of women to raise their voices on sexual assault. It has also been a way for them to explain the lack of reporting of such crimes. After the Kavanaugh scandal that opposed Brett Kavanaugh to Christine Blasey Ford, many, including President Trump, wondered why she did not report the attempted rape that allegedly took place thirty years ago. To support the victim, a new hashtag was born on social media: #WhyIDidntReport. Celebrities as well as anonymous people explained why they did not file

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<sup>173</sup> See the numbers on page 84.

<sup>174</sup> Susan Milligan. “Sexual Assault Reports Spike in #MeToo Era.” *US News & World Report*, 27 Dec. 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2018-12-27/sexual-assault-reports-spike-in-metoo-era>.

a complaint. The most recurring answers were the fear of not being believed, the feeling of shame and the trauma that could last for years.<sup>175</sup>

As for domestic violence, which was also denounced by #MeToo, the numbers are also pretty high: studies state that 20 people per minute are subjected to physical violence by their partner. 1 in 4 women are physically abused by their partner, against 1 in 9 men. Statistics also say that 20,000 phone calls are made to domestic violence hotlines every day, and that intimate partner violence represents 15% of all violent crimes in the United States.<sup>176</sup> These statistics were published in 2018, a year after #MeToo.

Once again, it proves that #MeToo cannot be effective on the short term, as numbers on violence against women are still incredibly high. The impact of #MeToo on these issues might thus be seen in a few years with the application of more laws to protect victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

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<sup>175</sup> “#WhyIDidntReport Backs Kavanaugh Accuser.” *BBC*, 23 Sept. 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45621124>.

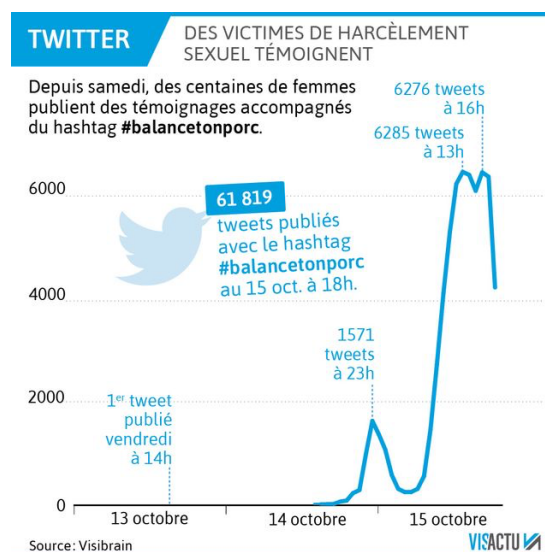
<sup>176</sup> “20 Alarming Domestic Violence Statistics for 2018.” *NCADV*, 2 Oct. 2018, <https://www.socialsolutions.com/blog/domestic-violence-statistics-2018/>.

### **3.3. #MeToo Abroad: an International Movement**

#### **3.3.1. Europe**

In Europe, it is easy to see how impactful #MeToo has been. Many countries followed the American example by creating their own hashtags to denounce sexual assault on social media.

In France, the #BalanceTonPorc hashtag was launched on October 13th 2017, two days before #MeToo went viral on Twitter. In reaction to the Harvey Weinstein case, journalist Sandra Muller started the French movement by encouraging victims of sexual harassment in the workplace to denounce their abuser. Though less successful than #MeToo which has a bigger reach, #BalanceTonPorc still had considerable success.



This chart made by Visibrain, which makes statistics on social media issues, shows that 61,819 messages were tweeted on #BalanceTonPorc two days after the movement started.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Laure Cometti. “#Balancetonporc: Sur Twitter, la parole des victimes de harcèlement sexuel à moitié libérée par le «name and shame».” *20 Minutes*, 16 Oct. 2017, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2151895-20171016-balancetonporc-twitter-parole-victimes-harcelement-sexuel-moitie-liberee-name-and-shame>.



One year later, almost one million people tweeted on the French hashtag, with 931,000 messages.

Though it remained popular for a few days, the movement rapidly faced backlash. High-profile men who were accused of sexual harassment or worse tried to defend themselves by putting the blame on their victims. Sandra Muller, the journalist who first used #BalanceTonPorc, was sued for defamation by Eric Brion, the man she accused of having sexually harassed her.<sup>178</sup> Many other women came forward with accusations and a lot of them were considered as liars. Among all the accused men, only Islam specialist Tariq Ramadan was arrested but he was freed a few months later.

Backlash also came from an unexpected source: women. In early January 2018, 100 women including actress Catherine Deneuve signed an editorial in the prestigious newspaper *Le Monde*, defending men's "freedom to bother women" in order to "preserve sexual liberty."<sup>179</sup> In other words they defended the right of men to hit on women in public spaces. They also claim that the movement has destroyed the lives of many men who did things that were not as unacceptable as feminists said they were. (Kucinkas).

As the movement unfolded on social media, men reacted on the same platforms. As well as for #MeToo, some men welcomed the movement but many rejected it. Many of them denounced the women who spoke out on social platforms instead of going to the police.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Thibaut Solano. "#Balancetonporc: Ces Plaignantes Désormais Accusées." *L'Express*, 4 Oct. 2018, [https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/balancetonporc-ces-plaignantes-desormais-accusees\\_2038045.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/balancetonporc-ces-plaignantes-desormais-accusees_2038045.html).

<sup>179</sup> Audrey Kucinkas. "Dans une tribune, cent femmes, dont Catherine Deneuve, dénoncent #balancetonporc." *L'Express*, 9 Jan. 2018, [https://www.lexpress.fr/styles/vip/dans-une-tribune-cent-femmes-dont-catherine-deneuve-denoncent-balancetonporc\\_1974501.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/styles/vip/dans-une-tribune-cent-femmes-dont-catherine-deneuve-denoncent-balancetonporc_1974501.html).

<sup>180</sup> O.P.V. "Comment les hommes ont réagi à #BalanceTonPorc." *20 Minutes*, 16 Oct. 2017, <https://www.20minutes.fr/high-tech/2151799-20171016-comment-hommes-reagi-balancetonporc>.

Others even treated feminist women as “Feminazis” who hate men and complained about no longer being able to say anything, according to many tweets (O.P.V).

The backlash against #BalanceTonPorc and its few results show how limited such movements can be. #MeToo came up two days after #BalanceTonPorc and even though it has been more impactful thanks to its bigger reach, it has faced similar criticisms.

The impact of #MeToo in the United Kingdom has been quite similar to its impact in America but with its own cases. Attention was thus focused on power institutions such as Westminster, where the issue of sexual harassment is now seriously tackled. The press as well as victims started to call out politicians such as Michael Fallon and Damian Green who were seen as being “handsy at parties.”<sup>181</sup> Other politicians were called out, such as Charlie Elphicke, who was accused of rape by a former employee.<sup>182</sup> Andrew Griffiths, another Member of Parliament, was accused of having sent thousands of lewd text messages to women (Norris). Though these two politicians were suspended from Parliament, they were reinstated as Members of Parliament for a vote of confidence on Prime Minister Theresa May. Labour Members of Parliament saw that as a “betrayal of women” and criticized Theresa May for letting these two men be reinstated.<sup>183</sup> Like in France and the United States, the impact of #MeToo is limited: two politicians who were suspended after being accused of sexual

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<sup>181</sup> Karla Adam, William Booth. *A Year after It Began, Has #MeToo Become a Global Movement?* 5 Oct. 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-year-after-it-began-has-metoo-become-a-global-movement/2018/10/05/1fc0929e-c71a-11e8-9c0f-2ffaf6d422aa\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9e1f7d77b9a5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-year-after-it-began-has-metoo-become-a-global-movement/2018/10/05/1fc0929e-c71a-11e8-9c0f-2ffaf6d422aa_story.html?utm_term=.9e1f7d77b9a5).

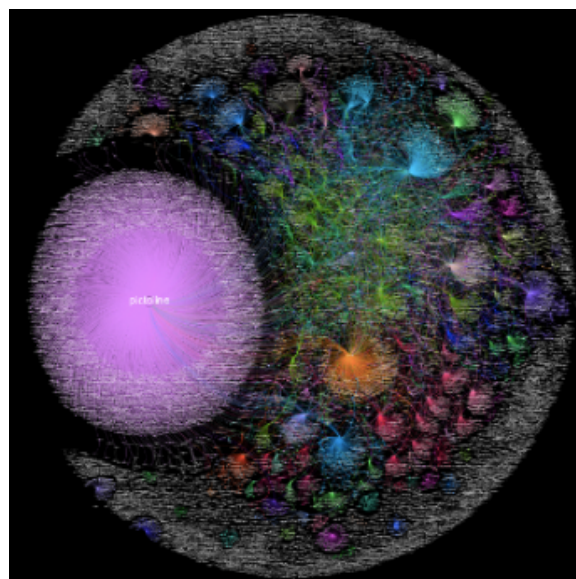
<sup>182</sup> Sian Norris. “After Me Too, Can We Trust the UK Government to Tackle Sexual Abuse?” *OpenDemocracy*, 22 Dec. 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/after-me-too-uk-government-sexual-abuse/>.

<sup>183</sup> *Anger as Accused MPs Get Whip Restored*. 13 Dec. 2018. [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-46544328>.

harassment and rape won back their jobs when their votes were needed, thus proving #MeToo was not strong enough to bring down such powerful men. Action was thus taken in Parliament to change this outcome. “Behaviour codes” and human resources support were introduced for better respect for women (Norris). Other cases that took place within the British government also had disappointing outcomes for the plaintiffs. Liberal Democratic politician Lord Lester was accused of sexual harassment by Jasvinder Sanghera, a women’s rights activists. She asked for her abuser to be suspended but the process was blocked, and the victim was criticized and mocked by his supporters (Norris).

Even after #MeToo, women are still not listened to enough, and alleged abusers did not lose their jobs, thus showing that #MeToo has not marked a total revolution in Great Britain.

In Southern Europe, such as in Italy or Spain, #MeToo has also made the headlines. Like in France, Spain created its own hashtag to denounce sexual assault, #YoTambien. It quickly spread to all Spanish-speaking countries, from Europe to South America. Artist Erin Gallagher, who created visual charts about #MeToo,<sup>184</sup> also made one for #YoTambien, showing how many people used the hashtag.



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<sup>184</sup> See reference on pages 38-39.

Remember, the biggest cells correspond to communities of people who used the hashtag. From October 16 to October 18, 2017, Gallagher collected more than 21,800 tweets (Gallagher). The biggest cell is that of Pictoline, which attracted the biggest number of people on #YoTambien. This account published one of the first tweets of the hashtag: “No solo es Harvey Weinstein, No solo pasa in Hollywood, No solo son unas cuantas” (It’s not only Harvey Weinstein, It’s doesn’t only happen in Hollywood, It doesn’t only happen to a few women.)<sup>185</sup>

Another hashtag was devoted to women’s rights in Spain after #MeToo: #Cuéntalo. This one emerged a bit later than #MeToo or #YoTambien, in April 2018, in response to a judicial verdict which acquitted five men who had gang raped an 18 year-old girl in Pamplona in 2016. Instead of being sentenced on rape charges, they were sentenced for sexual abuse, which is not considered as sexual assault under Spanish law.<sup>186</sup> Though they were still sent to prison, their sentence is much shorter than the one they would have received for rape. Many in Spain were outraged by this outcome, and this anger gave birth to #Cuéntalo (Nayler). This hashtag was used by victims of sexual assault to denounce what happened to them. #Cuéntalo can also be characterized by stories of victims who are unable to come forward because they were killed by their abuser:

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<sup>185</sup> @pictoline. “No solo es Harvey Weinstein No solo pasa en Hollywood No solo son unas cuantas #MeToo #YoTambiénpic.twitter.com/Ik3zclEc3T.” *Twitter* 17 Oct. 2017, [https://twitter.com/pictoline/status/920373869256499200?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E920373869256499200&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fmedium.com%2Fmedia%2F3eabe8808dacb83de1a690bb19cc8731%3FpostId%3D960dd5a97cdf](https://twitter.com/pictoline/status/920373869256499200?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E920373869256499200&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fmedium.com%2Fmedia%2F3eabe8808dacb83de1a690bb19cc8731%3FpostId%3D960dd5a97cdf).

<sup>186</sup> Mark Nayler. “What to Know About #Cuéntalo, The Spanish Version of #MeToo.” *Culture Trip*, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/spain/articles/what-to-know-about-cuentalo-the-spanish-version-of-metoo/>. Accessed 12 Apr. 2019.

"I am 22 and have a slight psychological disability. 4 men kidnap me and rape me repeatedly. Not happy with that, they run me over 7 times. Still alive, they throw petrol on me and set me on fire. 3 of my murderers are free. I am telling this story because Sandra Palo cannot. #Cuéntalo."<sup>187</sup>

After the outrage following the verdict of this case, the Spanish government decided to “consider changing rape laws.”<sup>188</sup> And it did: in July 2018, Spain introduced a sexual consent law to “remove ambiguity in rape cases.”<sup>189</sup> This law was introduced after the 18-year-old girl who was raped by the gang was considered as consenting to the sexual intercourses because she was being silent and did not try to fight her abusers (Burgen). This law will thus allow victims to seek justice more easily. Though the verdict of this case was rather negative, the reaction of the people did encourage the government to be more respectful toward victims of sexual assault. The fact that things finally start to change is a positive impact of #MeToo, as what happened after the verdict of the trial might not have happened without #MeToo.

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<sup>187</sup> @martolius. “Tengo 22 años y una leve discapacidad psíquica. 4 hombres me raptan y me violan repetidamente. No contentos, me atropellan 7 veces. Aún con vida me rocían con gasolina y me prenden fuego. 3 de mis asesinos están en la calle. Lo cuento yo porque Sandra Palo no puede. #Cuéntalo.” *Twitter*, 28 Apr, 2018 [https://twitter.com/martolius/status/990201907456208896?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E990201907456208896&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thelocal.es%2F20180430%2Fcuentalo-spanish-women-launch-their-own-metoo-movement](https://twitter.com/martolius/status/990201907456208896?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E990201907456208896&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thelocal.es%2F20180430%2Fcuentalo-spanish-women-launch-their-own-metoo-movement).

<sup>188</sup> Govan, Fiona. “#Cuéntalo: Spanish Women Launch Their Own #Metoo Movement.” *The Local Es*, 30 Apr. 2018, <https://www.thelocal.es/20180430/cuentalo-spanish-women-launch-their-own-metoo-movement>.

<sup>189</sup> Burgen, Stephen. “Spain to Introduce ‘Yes Means Yes’ Sexual Consent Law.” *The Guardian*, 18 July 2018. [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/18/spain-to-introduce-yes-means-yes-sexual-consent-law>.

In Italy, #MeToo did not have such a positive impact. Italians did create their own hashtag, #QuellaVoltaChe (That time when...). But it did not have as much success as hashtags in other countries: “only” 20,000 messages in one week.<sup>190</sup>

In addition to the comparatively low numbers, the backlash against #MeToo in Italy was expressed through skepticism and criticism from a lot of people. #MeToo gained the attention of the media when Italian actress Asia Argento became one of Harvey Weinstein’s accusers. In her birth country, she was attacked by many people who did not believe her, according to an *NPR* article.<sup>191</sup> In this article, Sylvia Poggioli quotes Vittorio Feltri, a newspaper editor, on Asia Argento’s allegations against Harvey Weinstein: “First, these women give it away. Then, 20 years later, they repent and denounce the alleged rapist. And if they gave it away in exchange for a part in a movie, that's a form of prostitution.” (Feltri, Poggioli).

#MeToo and #QuellaVoltaChe did lead to an attempt to bring down a powerful man, movie director Fausto Brizzi, who was accused of sexual abuse by ten women. According to Francesca Marciano, he was better defended and listened to than his victims. “The press is not giving voice to the women. It’s just giving voice to the men and the men who defend the men and the women who defend the men. The culture of support for women is nonexistent” (Marciano).

This patriarchal view of women can partly be explained by Italy’s former misogynist leaders, such as Silvio Berlusconi. Simona Siri, an Italian journalist based in New York,

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<sup>190</sup> Angiola Codacci-Pisanelli. “La galleria degli orrori di quella volta che: tra rabbia e disgusto le denunce delle donne.” *l’Espresso*, 7 Mar. 2018, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2018/03/06/news/quante-molestie-quellavoltache-1.319237>.

<sup>191</sup> Sylvia Poggioli. “In Italy, #MeToo Falters Amid Public Scorn.” *NPR.Org*, 18 Jan. 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/01/18/578562334/in-italy-metoo-falters-amid-public-scorn>.

describes Berlusconi as being so misogynistic that “the cultural phenomenon of his personal machismo signaled to Italian men that it was acceptable and even normal to objectify and diminish women.”<sup>192</sup> In other words, the cliché of macho men in Italy was reinforced by Berlusconi’s sexism and #MeToo did not manage to reverse it, hence the backlash against the few victims who came forward (Siri).

In Italy, few women came forward compared to survivors from other countries like the United States or France. The same could be said about the men called to account in Italy: Simona Siri explains in her *Washington Post* article that the only two men who were accused of sexual assault were soon forgotten by the mainstream press, thus belittling the stories of their victims as old news (Siri)

Siri also explains the #MeToo blip by pointing to the lack of women in higher offices. This absence of women in positions of power makes it harder for Italy to introduce laws to promote gender equality and proper behavior towards women.

### **3.3.2. Asia**

#MeToo has spread more or less successfully in the Western World. But it even reached countries of the Eastern World. In Asia, the movement has also had repercussions similar to those in Europe. #MeToo reached China with an open letter written by Luo Xixi, a young Chinese woman living in America, in January 2018. In this letter, she details how she was sexually abused by her PhD supervisor in 2004. It was read more than three million times

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<sup>192</sup> Simona Siri. “Having a Misogynist Leader Has Consequences. And No, I Don’t Mean Trump.” *Washington Post*, 14 Dec. 2017, <https://www.google.fr/amp/s/www.washingtonpost.com/amphtml/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/12/14/the-metoo-movements-disturbing-failure-in-italy/>.

on Chinese social media.<sup>193</sup> It was one of the first times that discussion about sexual harassment was opened to so many people, in a country where so many bans and censorships take place. The Chinese government did not really approve of #MeToo: it censored the movement to keep it from spreading. Chinese feminist activists thus had to find other ways to denounce sexual assault and everyday sexism: they had to create their own hashtags to avoid censorship. They launched #MiTu, which is a homophonic of #MeToo but actually means “rice bunny.”<sup>194</sup> Activists also formed collaborations with lawyers and journalists to make the movement spread more easily. #MeToo found support in universities, where petitions to end sexual harassment were drafted. Overall, some 8,000 students signed petitions in 16 universities in just a few days.<sup>195</sup> Chinese universities are unsafe for many young women in China: according to a survey, 70% of women reported being sexually harassed (Dixon). Professors were thus dismissed from their universities, such as Chen Xiaowu, the man who was accused of attempted rape by Luo Xixi, who wrote the open letter that launched #MeToo in China. Sexual harassment was also fought in other backgrounds, like in non-governmental organizations. According to Simina Mistreanu, the head of a prominent NGO, Lei Chuang, had to leave his job because of accusations of sexual assault. As a consequence, 100 other organizations started to adopt anti sexual harassment measures. These anti-harassment measures are all the more revolutionary as there is no clear definition of sexual harassment in China (Fan).

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<sup>193</sup> Jiayang Fan. *China’s #MeToo Moment*. Feb. 2018. [www.newyorker.com](https://www.newyorker.com), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/chinas-me-too-moment>.

<sup>194</sup> Robyn Dixon. “How China’s Feminists Launched #MeToo in a Country Where Protest Is Barely Possible.” *Latimes.Com*, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-china-metoo-09142018-story.html>.

<sup>195</sup> Simina Mistreanu. “China’s #MeToo Activists Have Transformed a Generation.” *Foreign Policy*, 10 Jan. 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/10/chinas-metoo-activists-have-transformed-a-generation/>.



Though great achievements were made in China, #MeToo was far from being supported by everybody. The hashtag was banned by the government, as feminism is not in accordance with the Chinese patriarchal society. Backlash also came from the men who were accused of sexual misconduct. The first case to bring #MeToo to the courts was that of Xianzi, a young woman who posted an account on social media detailing her allegations of sexual assault against TV star Zhu Jun. Though her letter went viral, it did not have the outcome she expected – Jun decided to sue her for damaging his reputation and mental wellbeing.”<sup>196</sup> The victim also received threats after she came forward. It shows that while China is progressing in protecting women’s rights thanks to #MeToo, many people are still too conservative to change their behavior.

Another Asian country whose reaction to #MeToo is worth studying is Japan. The Japanese feminists started to say “#MeToo” when a 28-year-old woman, Shiori Ito, accused a prominent journalist, Noriyuki Yamaguchi, of having raped her in 2015, but the charges were rapidly dropped.<sup>197</sup> What started the spread of the movement in Japan is the publication of a book detailing her allegations in October 2017. It encouraged other Japanese women to come forward, in a country where only 18.5% of victims find the courage to report what happened to them.

The spread of #MeToo in Japan led to the birth of other feminist movements. In January 2019, a student called Kazuna Yamamoto created #StandUpJapan in response to a

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<sup>196</sup> Beijing bureau. “China #MeToo Intern Sued by Accused Star.” *BBC*, 27 Sept. 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-45636196>.

<sup>197</sup> Monica Hunter-Hart. “This Is What #MeToo Looks Like In Japan.” *Bustle*, <https://www.bustle.com/p/how-did-metoo-start-in-japan-these-voices-are-planting-small-yet-powerful-seeds-of-change-7770062>.

sexist article published in the Japanese magazine *Spa!*.<sup>198</sup> This article was a list of universities where the female students were the easiest to seduce. She wrote a petition that was signed by more than 25,000 people in two days, and 50,000 after two weeks (Brochard Lebrun).

Yamamoto's and Ito's main aim was to change mentalities about how to treat women.

According to the latter, the Japanese society is one "where women are exposed to sexism and harassment from a young age." (Ito, Hunter Hart).

This can explain why so few women dare to report sexual assault: they are used to sexism and they are scared they will not be believed. Another hashtag was thus launched to help those victims: #WeToo. This hashtag was created by Monica Fukuhara, a woman who was sexually assaulted by a man while she was working as a waitress. According to her, the purpose of #WeToo is to "show greater solidarity. We are letting victims know they're not alone and that we listen and support, making it easier to speak up."<sup>199</sup> This hashtag was also made to help victims who did speak up but who faced backlash. The case of Shiori Ito represents what victims of sexual assault face when they come forward in Japan: she was discouraged by the police from filing a report, not believed and shamed:

The backlash hit me hard. I was vilified on social media and received hate messages and emails and calls from unknown numbers. I was called a "slut" and "prostitute" and told I should "be dead." There were arguments over my nationality, because a true Japanese woman wouldn't speak about such "shameful" things. Fake stories

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<sup>198</sup> Victor Brochard-Lebrun. "Avec le #StandUpJapan, une étudiante met le Japon face à son sexisme." *Le Huffington Post*, 4 Feb. 2019, [https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/victor-brochard-lebrun/avec-le-standupjapan-une-etudiante-met-le-japon-face-a-son-sexisme\\_a\\_23656509/](https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/victor-brochard-lebrun/avec-le-standupjapan-une-etudiante-met-le-japon-face-a-son-sexisme_a_23656509/).

<sup>199</sup> Kurumi Mori, Shoko Oda. "#MeToo Becomes #WeToo in Victim-Blaming Japan." *Bloomberg*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-09/-metoo-becomes-wetoo-in-victim-blaming-japan>.

popped up online about my private life with photos of my family. I received messages from women criticizing me for failing to protect myself.<sup>200</sup>

The backlash against Ito and other victims of sexual assault shows that while women are encouraged to speak up, the #MeToo movement is still fragile in Japan, as the patriarchal culture makes it hard for mentalities to be changed on gender equality and on the security of Japanese women.

The last Asian country that needs to be dealt with is India. It is common knowledge that the condition of women there is one of the worst in the world, with huge statistics of rape and large numbers of unreported sex crimes. It is thus worth to study the spread of #MeToo there. #MeToo spread in India thanks to Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta, who accused her former co-star Nana Patekar of sexual harassment during the shooting of a film in 2008.<sup>201</sup> Another case at the heart of #MeToo in India is that of Priya Ramani, who accused editor M.J Akbar of sexually harassing her during a job interview. Akbar resigned from his job as foreign minister, thus becoming one of the first powerful men to face consequences because of #MeToo in India.<sup>202</sup> These cases have had other encouraging effects: in response to the resignation of Akbar, the government announced that it would consider changing sexual harassment laws.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Shiori Ito. "Saying #MeToo in Japan." *Politico*, 2 Jan. 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/metoo-sexual-assault-women-rights-japan/>.

<sup>201</sup> Manveena Suri. "India's #MeToo Moment? Media and Entertainment Industry Shaken by Allegations." *CNN*, 19 Oct. 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/10/asia/india-metoo-intl/index.html>.

<sup>202</sup> Jen Kirby. "The Rise of #MeToo in India." *Vox*, 24 Oct. 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/10/24/17989650/me-too-india-akbar>.

<sup>203</sup> Manoj Kumar. "India Looks to Tighten Sexual Harassment Laws: Government Officials." *Reuters*, 18 Oct. 2018. *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-harassment-law-idUSKCN1MS1PJ>.

#MeToo thus developed in high-ranked institutions of popular culture and power. But like in the United States, some women were feeling left out by the movement, especially women from lower-classes. They thought #MeToo was only meant to serve the rich and famous.<sup>204</sup> The symbol of this feeling of exclusion in India is that of Meena, a domestic worker whose story is told in an article published by the *BBC*. According to the author of the piece, Sreeparna Chattopadhyay, Meena borrowed money from her bosses to pay for her daughter's wedding, but she decided to leave their home after being sexually harassed by her employer. The couple thus started to harass her to get their money back. Meena, like many other domestic workers in India, was left traumatized by this experience. A Martha Farrell Foundation survey showed that 29% of domestic workers admitted to having experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the region of New Delhi.<sup>205</sup> According to the same survey, 65.6% have been stalked and 61.8% reported lewd comments and gestures (Martha Farrell Foundation). But as the #MeToo movement evolves, these stories are told more and more often in mainstream media, thus raising awareness on the issue of sexual assault on women from every background.

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<sup>204</sup> Sreeparna Chattopadhyay. "The Women Left behind by #MeToo in India." *BBC*, 10 Feb. 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47025662>.

<sup>205</sup> Martha Farrell Foundation. *Sexual Harassment of Domestic Workers at Their Workplaces*. 2018, [http://www.marthafarrellfoundation.org/uploaded\\_files/pdf\\_files/1529667465\\_First%20report.pdf](http://www.marthafarrellfoundation.org/uploaded_files/pdf_files/1529667465_First%20report.pdf).

### **3.3.3. Africa**

The last continent we are going to study is Africa. It is important to see whether and how #MeToo has reached this continent where women have faced serious mistreatment for centuries. African women's experience of sexism includes child marriages, rape as a war weapon, or mutilation.

But the countries of Africa did not have the same relationship with #MeToo as other countries in the Western World or in Asia. African feminists felt a feeling of exclusion seeing the media coverage of the movement. They denounce how mainstream media such as the CNN or the BBC mainly focused on the United States, Europe, China or India, and barely mentioned Africa or the Middle East where feminists also tried to start their #MeToo moment.<sup>206</sup> According to African blogger Titilope Ajayi, "CNN did not cite a single African #MeToo champion in a piece in which it sought to show how the movement was traveling globally" (Ajayi).

This feeling of exclusion was also expressed through the racial divisions that contributed to the backlash of #MeToo when it started to spread after Alyssa Milano's tweet: black women felt alienated by the movement because they felt it was mainly aimed to serve rich and white women as it became more popular when they started to use it.<sup>207</sup>

However, women in Africa did use #MeToo similarly to women in America, Europe and Asia: they tried to fight patriarchy by creating their own movements on local levels. One

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<sup>206</sup> Titilope Ajayi. "#MeToo, Africa and the Politics of Transnational Activism." *Africa Is A Country*, 7 June 2018, <https://africasacountry.com/2018/07/metoo-africa-and-the-politics-of-transnational-activism>.

<sup>207</sup> Amanda Gouws. "#MeToo Isn't Big in Africa. But Women Have Launched Their Own Versions." *The Conversation*, 7 Mar. 2019, <http://theconversation.com/metoo-isnt-big-in-africa-but-women-have-launched-their-own-versions-112328>.

See pages 42-44.

of the best-known African feminist movements is #MyDressMyChoice. It was created in Kenya after a woman was violently assaulted at a bus stop in Nairobi because she was wearing a short skirt.<sup>208</sup> This event triggered marches across the country to denounce the assault and the weak answer of the police who did not do anything because the victim did not report the crime (Regev). This happened in 2014, three years before #MeToo took off. Both movements are similar but only one made international headlines, which reinforces the feeling of alienation African feminists have been feeling since October 2017.

In Nigeria, like in Kenya, a movement was created before #MeToo to denounce everyday sexism and discrimination. In 2015, members of a book club read *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, and they decided something needed to be done to erase this systematic sexism women face everyday in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. They created #BeingFemaleInNigeria, which was used by 17,000 people in just a few hours.<sup>209</sup> But according to one of its creators, Florence Warmate, the hashtag might not have a long-term effect. She thinks sexism is “culturally engrained” in Nigeria, thus making the rise of feminist movements much harder than in Western countries (Anyangwe).

In Senegal another movement was started in reaction to #MeToo: #Nopiwouma, which means “I will not shut up.” It was created in November 2017 by two women from Dakar, who wished to break the silence on sexual harassment in a country where women are discouraged to come forward.<sup>210</sup> Sexual assault is still underreported in Senegal, as only 8% of women

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<sup>208</sup> Dana Regev. “#MyDressMyChoice: Kenyans Hold Rally to Support Woman Beaten for Wearing Miniskirt.” *DW.COM*, 17 Nov. 2014, <https://www.dw.com/cda/en/mydressmychoice-kenyans-hold-rally-to-support-woman-beaten-for-wearing-miniskirt/a-18069645>.

<sup>209</sup> Eliza Anyangwe. “What’s It Really like #BeingFemaleinNigeria?” *CNN*, 1 July 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/06/30/africa/being-female-in-nigeria/index.html>.

<sup>210</sup> Eliza Mackintosh. “The Me Too Movement Was Silent in Senegal. These Women Are Trying to Change That.” *CNN*, No Date, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/19/africa/senegal-as-equals-intl/index.html>.

reported this type of crime (Mackintosh). Another hashtag was started, #Doyna, “that’s enough”. Its creator, Fatima Zahra Ba, 25, explains its purpose: ”Women can't break the silence if they don't feel at ease doing so, and that's the problem here in Senegal, you feel like everybody knows what's happening ... but people are just like, 'Oh, it's fine. It happens to everybody.' There's no condemnation.” (Ba) Her aim is thus to break the “culture of silence” that prevails in Senegal (Mackintosh).

In these countries as well as everywhere in Africa, this culture of silence contributes to the backlash against #MeToo and the resistance against any feminist movement rising in Africa. The few women who have spoken out on their specific cases faced mockery and threats, like Sylvia Rwabwogo in Uganda. The parliamentarian reported being stalked by a man and was belittled by her male colleagues and the press.<sup>211</sup> Like her, most victims in Africa are shamed and stigmatized, which can explain the slow development of #MeToo there. Agnes Odhiambo says that “it has been slower to take off in Africa. Women are still shamed for speaking about sexual violence. The retaliation they face can be brutal and their character is assassinated - and yet there is little support available to them” (Bhalla, Lazareva). The lack of anti-harassment laws in most African countries can also explain this backlash against victims who denounce their assaulters (Bhalla, Lazareva).

As for countries in the Middle East, similar comments can be made on the spread of #MeToo. Most Middle East countries have patriarchal societies, and in some of them, like in Iran or Saudi Arabia, women and girls are forced to be veiled. The latter is one of the most repressive countries in terms of gender equality. It is common knowledge that Saudi women cannot have property or travel without the approval of a male tutor. But things are slowly

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<sup>211</sup> Nita Bhalla and Inna Lazareva. “Why Africa’s #Metoo Is More a Murmur than an Outcry.” *Reuters*, 8 Mar. 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-womens-day-africa-metoo-feature-idUSKCN1QP1VO>.

starting to change as women have just obtained the right to drive a car. This is the first victory of feminist activists who were boosted by the rise of #MeToo in other countries.<sup>212</sup>

In the West Bank, #MeToo spread thanks to 21-year-old Yasmeen Mjalli. She created clothes showing the following message: “Not your Habtiti” (darling), to encourage women to fight sexual harassment.<sup>213</sup>

But like in Africa, women from the West Bank as well as all Middle Eastern countries are very likely to face serious criticism and threats, thus limiting the development of feminist movements there. But feminist activists are starting to fight against everyday sexism and gender roles which are still entrenched in Arab societies.

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<sup>212</sup> Manal Al-Sharif. “We Finally Won the Right to Drive in Saudi Arabia. But the Kingdom’s War on Women Is Only Getting Worse.” *Time*, 10 Apr. 2019, <http://time.com/5567330/saudi-arabia-women-rights-drive/>.

<sup>213</sup> Lucy Pasha-Robinson. “Meet the Young Palestinian Woman Bringing the #MeToo Movement to the West Bank.” *The Independent*, 3 Feb. 2018, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/palestinian-metoo-yasmeen-mjalli-not-your-habibti-woman-west-bank-palestine-israel-a8192841.html>.



# CONCLUSION

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To conclude this study of the #MeToo movement, we need to answer the question that drove the analysis: Should #MeToo be considered as a revolution or more as a blip, or even part of a backlash against feminism?

Through our study, we have seen that feminism had existed for decades, even centuries before #MeToo started. As a consequence, the 2017 movement did not come all of a sudden. Divided into waves, feminism has already witnessed several movements. Twenty-first century feminism was fueled by Donald Trump's election as President of the United States in late 2016, thus paving the way for #MeToo. We could thus think that such a movement was expected, but it did not genuinely occur until October 2017 when the Weinstein scandal broke out. At that time it was seen as a revolution: a powerful man who had been harassing women for decades was finally brought down. After these events some people started to reflect on their past and current behaviors vowing change for the better, which *is* revolutionary. This change of behavior came from many men who were shocked by the stories that were told thanks to #MeToo, which is one of the many positive impacts of the movement. But not everybody had such a reaction. #MeToo had to face a backlash from men who were scared to see women gain more freedom and equality, and from women who say they prefer traditional gender roles or who feel alienated by the movement.

Abroad, #MeToo did spread quickly in Europe, Asia and even Africa. It is thus a global movement, as women from all over the world tried to create their feminist agenda following the American example. However, the answer to #MeToo was not the same in every country. The feminist movement has been criticized almost everywhere, and some countries

have even banned the #MeToo hashtag or worse, have not allowed a feminist movement to take place. Some countries did try to change their laws in favor of victims of sexual assault, but everywhere statistics for these crimes are still very high. The percentage of women who come forward is very low especially in Africa and Asia, where they are discouraged to do so because of victim blaming and shaming.

Eighteen months after #MeToo, the assessment is thus mixed. The movement can be seen as a revolution in some ways and as part of a backlash in other ways. Our conclusion here is that #MeToo is an unfinished revolution, which did have positive impacts over the short term, but whose longer-lasting impacts have not all been achieved yet.

We thus have to keep reading the news about #MeToo, try to spot changes in our societies and reflect on our own behaviors towards sexism and feminism. Who knows, in a few years, big changes of laws and mentalities might finally be made towards more equality and respect!

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