

## #MeToo

### What is #MeToo?

#MeToo is a hashtag campaign that circulated on Twitter and other social media platforms in which actress Alyssa Milano encouraged survivors of sexual assault and harassment to post "#MeToo" or "Me Too" to raise awareness and highlight its commonality.

### Origins?

The hashtag started trending worldwide after a call to action from actress Alyssa Milano: On October 15th, 2017, she tweeted a note which asked for victims of sexual harassment and assault to write 'me too' as a reply to her tweet (seen below).

It was in the wake of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein's downfall over allegations of sexual misconduct spanning decades. Posting on Twitter, Alyssa passed along a suggestion from a friend that women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted post "Me Too" to give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem. The hashtag is in support of all women who have been sexually harassed by someone.

Men have also been using the hashtag to show support to women and to reveal their own incidents of abuse too.



### Precursor

The Me Too project was founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2007. She started the campaign to serve sexual assault survivors in underprivileged communities. Burke, who is creating a documentary titled *Me Too*, has said she was inspired to use the phrase after being unable to respond to a 13-year-old girl who confided to her that she had been sexually assaulted. Burke later wished she had simply told the girl, "me too".

### Spread

Within hours of posting, the hashtag was the top trending topic on Twitter, where many other users, including celebrities and other public figures, were tweeting their own #metoo stories. The post also quickly made their way over to Facebook where over 70,000 users had posting under the #MeToo topic within 12 hours.

### The silence breakers

The "silence breakers" refer to any man or woman who came forward to say that they had been the victim of abuse. The group were named The Time Person Of The Year in December 2017.

- ⇒ Stars who tweeted the #MeToo hashtag: Lady Gaga, Monica Lewinsky, Debra Messing, Gabrielle Union, Anna Paquin, Patricia Arquette, Rosario Dawson, Rachel Wood, America Ferrera, Bjork, Sheryl Crow,

Gillian Anderson, Rosario Dawson, Selma Blair, Labour MP Stella Creasy...

### Purposes

- ⇒ empower women through empathy, especially young and vulnerable women. She said that #MeToo declares sexual violence sufferers are not alone and should not be ashamed.
- ⇒ give people the resources to have access to healing, and advocates for changes to laws and policies (Burke)
- ⇒ processing all untested rape kits, re-examining local school policies, improving the vetting of teachers, and updating sexual harassment policies. (Burke)
- ⇒ changing the laws surrounding sexual harassment and assault, for example, instituting protocols that give sufferers in all industries the ability to file complaints without retaliation. (Milano)

### Criticisms

- ⇒ French cinema icon Catherine Deneuve, 74, has denounced the Me Too movement in an open letter published in France's *Le Monde* newspaper. Her open letter claimed that "legitimate protests against the sexual violence that women are subject to, particularly in their professional lives," had turned into a "witch hunt." Catherine continued: "Rape is a crime, but trying to seduce someone, even persistently or clumsily, is not - nor is men being gentlemanly a macho attack. "Men have been punished summarily, forced out of their jobs when all they did was touch someone's knee or try to steal a kiss."
- ⇒ Some actors have admonished proponents of the movement for not distinguishing between different degrees of sexual misconduct. Matt Damon commented on the phenomenon in an interview, and later apologized, saying "the clearer signal to men and to younger people is, deny it. Because if you take responsibility for what you did, your life's going to get ruined."
- ⇒ Possible trauma to victims: The hashtag has been criticized for putting the responsibility of publicizing sexual harassment and abuse on those who experienced it, which could be re-traumatizing. The hashtag has been criticized as inspiring fatigue and outrage, rather than emotionally dense communication. Tony Robbins said he was "knocking victimhood" from the movement.
- ⇒ Not including sex workers: American journalist Steven Thrasher noted that, "There have been worries that the #MeToo movement could lead to a sex panic. But the real sex panic is not due to feminism run amok, but due to the patriarchal, homophobic, antagonistic desire of the US Congress to control sex workers."
- ⇒ Putting too much public focus on the consequences of specific individuals who have been accused of sexual misconduct, as opposed to discussing policies and changes to institutional norms that would help people who are currently experiencing sexual abuse.