

Celebrities as a vehicle for cultural issues: the metoo movement



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Celebrity acts as a vehicle for the expression of cultural themes and issues in the public sphere. Discuss this proposition with reference to either celebrity feminism or celebrity philanthropy ('celanthropy'). If you choose more than one example of either feminism or philanthropy (as they are enacted by celebrities), you need to reflect on how the different examples relate to one another.

Although the term "celebrity" has held different cultural meanings throughout history, whether it refers to Julius Caesar or Jennifer Lawrence, it has always meant someone who holds great influence over a society and/or a group of people. Celebrities act as a social gateway for the expression of cultural themes or issues in the public sphere. An overwhelming issue that is extremely prevalent within Hollywood and global society is misogyny and sexual harassment, especially when there are serial sexual assault allegations against a man who used to occupy a very large space within the industry, Harvey Weinstein. Since these allegations were made towards a man with connections to so many celebrities, it is no wonder that many of them felt the need to express their support for the multiple victims through the "#MeToo" movement that swept across the globe, showcasing just how influential celebrities can be. Thus, this essay will include the events that lead to the widespread "#MeToo" movement, the different feminist perspectives on this movement and to conclude, the large impact this movement has had on a global scale.

Although the "#MeToo" movement is mostly known through the hashtag which took social media by storm in 2017, the concept was created in 2006 by Tarana Burke. Burke is a civil rights activist who used the "Me Too" <https://assignbuster.com/celebrities-as-a-vehicle-for-cultural-issues-the-metoo-movement/>

phrase in regard to sexual abuse and assault so as to raise awareness of this issue globally and to encourage “ empowerment through empathy”, which is Burke’s campaign phrase. However, this movement became a global phenomenon by modern social media in 2017 following sexual abuse claims against Harvey Weinstein. The phrase was retweeted over 500, 000 times on Twitter and 12 million times on Facebook; “ Facebook reported that within the USA, where the movement started, over 45% of people know at least one person that used the hashtag.” (Mulheron , 2017). American actress, Alyssa Milano was the first of many to popularise this phrase in regard to the recent allegation through twitter in 2017. Milano crafted a tweet that stated, “ If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘ me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (Milano (Alyssa_Milano) 2017, Tweet). Milano thought that for people to understand how prevalent this issue is globally then there must be bulk evidence and voices standing together to create awareness in society. Little did she know that it would be the foundation of millions of voices coming together to share their own sexual assault stories and support, by mass populations and celebrities alike. The reason this movement had so much support from the celebrity industry is because Harvey Weinstein was one of the biggest film producers in Hollywood, he and his brother Bob Weinstein were the cofounders of the well-known entertainment company Miramax. While he still had a career, Weinstein collected many awards for his work such as seven Tony Awards, and an Academy Award for many of his films. Thus, disbelief erupted in the social and cultural sphere when originally more than a dozen women claimed that Weinstein was responsible for sexual assault, harassment and/or rape. Many other well-known women in the film industry thus came forward to report similar experiences regarding <https://assignbuster.com/celebrities-as-a-vehicle-for-cultural-issues-the-metoo-movement/>

Weinstein, today we now know that more than ninety women made related accusations against him. Although Weinstein has constantly denied any unconsented sexual relations, investigations and similar allegations show that he used monetary benefit and emotional manipulation on women in order to keep them from speaking out. This movement and its popularity through celebrity influence has become a vessel for the expression of women of all backgrounds and social statuses from A list celebrities to assistants to speak out about the injustice and harassment placed upon them from Harvey Weinstein.

Due to this movement conversations surrounding hostile environments, consent and power are beginning to take shape in both the media and in private life. Due to celebrities creating an outlet for women to speak up in solidarity about their own experiences, it has become a wave of general sexual assault within society, and while this creates awareness of what is happening globally, some feminists such as Betty Friedan believe that collective movements downplay the significance of each individual case, thus weakening the argument for change. The two arguments for and against the “#MeToo” movement are based around individualist and social feminisms. The individualist mode of feminism stands by the perspective that individual freedoms, personal responsibility and subjective psychological adjustments are the best way out of oppression imposed by the patriarchy and, moving forward, achieving equality with men. Thus, the fact that this movement is grouping a mass of women with ‘similar’ experiences together is troubling to those who belong to this individualist form of feminism such as Betty Friedan. Friedan was the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, a largely

influential feminist text throughout the 1960's and argues that basing cultural themes and issues of sexual harassment in the public sphere surrounding Hollywood is dangerous as it makes women's personal issues general (Donegan, 2018). However, social feminism takes a different perspective on the "#MeToo" movement as its ideology is that oppression can be overcome if women stand as a united voice in the face of sexism, in order to create political buzz, and hopefully in the long run, change. The origin of the ideology within social feminism came as a rebuttal from Italian Feminist Leopoldina Fortunati in regard to Betty Friedan's perspective within the feminine Mystique. Fortunati was not interested in self-improvement and internal empowerment as she takes a Marxist view that the key to equality is through understanding "men as a class related to women as a class" (Donegan, 2018). Thus, her perspective was that men would not have been able to succeed so far ahead of women career wise, if the women weren't working in the household. This social movement was based on the "understanding that a wage was necessary for work to be seen as work, and for the people who did it to be seen as worthy or dignity and protection" (Donegan, 2018), this relates to the "#MeToo" movement as social feminism believes that women coming together, protecting each other and hearing one another is the most powerful way to fight the patriarchy and social injustice, which in this case is serial sexual assault from a largely influential man. The fact that the "#MeToo" movement became so popular so quickly suggests that women in a modern society believe that misogyny is a structural concept and that women alike have a collective interest in fighting it.

Active evidence regarding the impacts of the “#MeToo” movement have just started to take place. The advancements that this movement have made can be seen through successful cases of legal persecutions, changing legislation and rising female support world-wide. Immediately after the popularisation of this movement, the “ increase of global resignations and out castings across the private and public sectors” (Stone and Vogelstein, 2019).

Across the globe, women’s rights have often been put on the back burner, especially in legal situations where men would routinely be exempt from their own crimes against women. The case of Khadija Siddiqi is an example of this as she was stabbed twenty-three times by a boy in her class after rejecting his advances towards her in 2016. He was not found guilty the first time the incident went to trial; however, Siddiqi did not give into the sexist result. She took to twitter and created the hashtag “#JusticeforKhadija” to create awareness for her case and ultimately had over two million people supporting her. As a result of this, two years later she won her appeal in the Pakistani Supreme Court and stated that “ Today is a victory for all women, a precedent has been set that if you raise your voice for truth, you will taste victory.” (Stone and Vogelstein, 2019). The globalisation of the “#MeToo” movement has given women the courage and strength to speak out against their own injustices due to the fact that celebrities are idolised within society, thus they create an influential example of how women should be treated. A further example of how this movement has progressed society is through Indian Bollywood culture. Bollywood, for generations was based upon Indian culture and had the main aim of delivering a story that subscribed to cultural standards. A popularly utilised story line is a gorgeous protagonist would be

stalked by a man that she did not originally like, realising at the end that she actually did like him, despite the fact that he kept pushing himself onto her in attempt to win her attention. Additionally, the protagonist would be further objectified through musical numbers with no relevance to the plot, Aishwarya Girinarayanan comments on this within her article stating this is “ The result of regressive, patriarchal norms that are still deeply internalised in our culture and society” (Girinarayanan, 2019). However, due to the movement starting in America, Indian actresses have witnessed the courage of Hollywood actresses, thus reconsidered their own treatment and income within Bollywood society. This is evident as more female leads are being cast and the pay steadily increasing due to the realisation of their own worth within their career. Therefore, there is no doubt that celebrities act as role models globally, whether their audience is young or old, in this instance the popular movement has encourage women to fight the patriarchy and reshape the way that the previous generations have been treated due to the acceptance of ‘ normal’ practice and the engrained fear of speaking out against the patriarchy.

In conclusion, the feminist “#MeToo” movement was a much-needed vessel that celebrities and women alike supported in order to further push the fight for equality within society. The “#MeToo” movement is an excellent example of the power and influence that celebrities hold over the world as the phrase was originally created in 2006, however it did not become a house hold phrase until it was popularised in Hollywood due to sexual assault allegations against a high profile man within American society. Thus, sexual harassment in particular has clearly been an issue woman face globally in their everyday

lives and this movement has been an integral part of women feeling like it is ok and important to talk about with others; and in some cases, has made women realise that the treatment they are receiving or received was not moral or right.

Reference list:

- Evans, A. (2018) . *#MeToo: a study on sexual assault as reported in the New York Times*. Western Washington University, Vol. 8, 1-8.
- Donegan, M. (2018). *How #MeToo revealed the central rift within feminism today: its not a generational divide but rather a split between two competing visions of feminism- social and individualist*. The Guardian . <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/11/how-metoo-revealed-the-central-rift-within-feminism-social-individualist>
- Girinarayanan, A. (2019). *Analyzing the sudden emergence and impact of the #MeToo movement in India*. Voices of Youth: human rights (unicef) <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/analyzing-sudden-emergence-and-impact-metoo-movement-india>
- Milano, Alyssa (Alyssa_Milano) “ *If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘ me too’ as a reply to this tweet*” 16 October 2017, 6: 21 a. m. Tweet.
- Mulheron, A. (2017). *The #MeToo movement & its impact on the workplace*. CHANGE<https://www.changerecruitmentgroup.com/why-change/meet-our-team>
- Pazzanese, C and Walsh, C. (2017). *The women’s revolt: Why now, and where to*. The Harvard Gazette: national and world affairs.

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/12/metoo-surge-could-change-society-in-pivotal-ways-harvard-analysts-say/>

- Stone, M and Vogelstein, R. (2019). *Celebrating #MeToo's global impact: in countries around the world, progress defies backlash.*

Foreign Policy- the Global Magazine of News and Ideas .

[https://foreignpolicy.](https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/07/metoo-global-impact-international-womens-day/)

[com/2019/03/07/metoo-global-impact-international-womens-day/](https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/07/metoo-global-impact-international-womens-day/)