**#MeToo: See Beyond The Hashtag**

[Susan Thistlethwaite](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/author/susan-thistlethwaite)/Oct 16, 2017

#MeToo is all over my social media. It hurts and yet, it does help. These two terrible words are being posted by friends, family and people I do not know at all. And yes, #MeToo.

But the shared pain is remarkably empowering. You can literally feel how it helps. You’re not the only one.

And yet, it is crucial even in the midst of these feelings that you are not alone to realize that [it was not started by a celebrity, Alyssa Milano.](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-entertainment-news-updates-metoo-campaign-me-too-alyssa-milano-1508173882-htmlstory.html)

The media seemed slow to wake up to the fact (see edited Salon article [here](https://www.salon.com/2017/10/16/metoo-now-what-a-post-harvey-weinstein-plan/)) that “MeToo” was in fact started by Tarana Burke, an organizer and youth worker who is a sexual assault survivor herself. Burke “has been working on “me too” since the mid-2000s — particularly with young women of color — as a means of what she calls empowerment through empathy.”

The [unfolding accusations of sexual harassment and assault by Harvey Weinstein](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/oct/11/the-allegations-against-harvey-weinstein-what-we-know-so-far) have given this social media campaign tremendous visibility, but it will come and then go. Burke knows this well.

Burke was interviewed by the LA Times. “Somebody asked me, does this [campaign] amplify your work? And it does in a certain way, but also when this hashtag dies down, and people thinking about it, I’ll still be doing the work,” Burke said.

The work of empowerment through empathy in order to combat the systemic violence against women and girls goes on and on because the violence and the struggle to recover and flourish again also goes on and on.

It is crucial, however, to recognize that this #MeToo campaign to combat violence against women was invented by an African American woman, and then given this exposure by women celebrities.

Never doubt that I believe and have witnessed to the fact that all women’s bodies are vulnerable to sexual violation. But to effectively combat this epidemic, you also need to know, really, deeply, concretely know, that society does not deliver all women’s bodies to this maw of patriarchal assault *in the same way*.

As I argue in [*Women’s Bodies as Battlefield: Christian Theology and the Global War on Women*](https://www.amazon.com/Womens-Bodies-Battlefield-Christian-Theology/dp/1137468149), bodies have races, sexual orientations, size, reproductive organs, religious and cultural meanings, and social locations within states and economies.

We dare not ignore this if we want to stop all the pain and heartbreak that is revealed in each posting of #MeToo.

It is the relationships of dominance and subordination that keep the systemic violence against women in place. If you have read anything about Weinstein, as well as other serial abusers, you know this is true.

To all those who are blaming women for not ‘not speaking up’ or ‘not going to the police,’ or other victim-blaming strategies, I want to simply tweet this: “It’s the power, stupid.”

So we need to focus on unequal social relations and how they are produced, maintained, policed, and punished if transgressed. If you don’t know that, then you don’t know how to interrupt them and eventually change them.

Race does a lot of the work of policing bodies. Homophobia does it. Transphobia does it. Economic inequality does it. Abelism does it. And yes, religion does that work too.

So, as Muslim scholar Najeeba Syeed has tweeted,

Najeeba Syeed (@NajeebaSyeed )

For Muslim women, [#metoo](https://twitter.com/hashtag/metoo?src=hash) often means a regular set of attacks on both our religion & gender.Islamophobia of a violent,virulent strain

[October 16, 2017](https://twitter.com/NajeebaSyeed/status/919837910488068096)

So when a Muslim women posts #MeToo we need to hear that it is fed by Islamophobia, feel the weight of Islamophobia and commit ourselves to engage this form of violence against women that delivers Muslim women’s bodies to violence in this particular way.

Does racism deliver the bodies of women and girls of color to violence against them? You bet it does. The #MeToo work of Tarana Burke, organizer, activist, and survivor testifies to this.

Women and girls with disabilities are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted and/or abused according to [Human Rights Watch](http://time.com/3734961/women-with-disabilities-three-times-as-likely-to-be-raped-human-rights-watch/).

Can you doubt that homophobia and transphobia are crucial mechanisms against women who identify as lesbian, as bi-sexual, as transgender? Who could doubt that when Donald Trump has made remarks, even just recently, about violence against LGBTQ people? (I will not repeat or link the remark.)

For all the decades I have done the work of trying to expose and end violence against women and girls, this has become clearer and clearer.

See the bodies, minds and spirits of each #MeToo post in their incredible diversity.

And then act like you do. ■