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Viewpoint
Symposium:
Implications
of the #MeToo
Movement for
Academia

Viewpoint Symposium Introduction: #MeToo in Academia: Understanding and Addressing Pervasive Challenges

The 'Me Too' movement began in 2006 to support survivors of sexual harassment and violence, particularly Black women and girls and other women of color from low-wealth communities (Me Too, About). This movement started as a local grassroots effort and has expanded to reach "a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to de-stigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of a sexual violence worldwide" (Me Too, About). Now, also recognized as "hashtag, MeToo" or #MeToo, largely due to its viral spread through social media, #MeToo has prioritized sexual harassment and violence in social, economic, and political spheres. Academia is not isolated from the movement and has been confronted, often times unwillingly, with survivors' accounts of sexual harassment and violence.

Prior to the onset of the #MeToo movement, sexual harassment and violence in academia received little attention. The larger #MeToo movement spawned subsequent movements within academic disciplines (see The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Report and the following examples: @MeTooSTEM, @MeTooANthro, @MeTooPoliSci), academic ranks (see #MeTooPhD), and even name faculty from colleges and universities (see: Academic Sexual Misconduct Database <https://academic-sexual-misconduct-database.org>). This increased attention and ubiquity of sexual harassment and violence in academia prompts us to question the cultural and structural factors that contribute to this problem. Karen Kelsky (2017) conducted a crowd-sourced survey of sexual harassment in the academy that documents more than 2,400 cases. The implications of the #MeToo movement for academia calls into question common practices, policies, and culture in higher education (Elias and D'Agostino 2019). The rampant sexual harassment and violence incidents prompt a larger conversation and rethinking of the power dynamics in academia, namely, the role of institutions and individuals in preventing sexual harassment and violence (Elias and D'Agostino 2019).

Our Women in the Public Sector blog, *Implications of the #MeToo Movement for Academia* (2019), set out to create a space to discuss the critical topic of sexual harassment and violence in the field of public administration. Our call for submissions encouraged contributors to question and suggest changes to the practices and structures that perpetuate and render sex and gender inequity invisible. We asked authors to focus on the role of institutions and individuals in preventing sexual harassment and assault, as well as propose solutions to difficult challenges. To continue the discussion and further develop solutions for practice in academia, the blog contributors were invited to submit to this Viewpoint Symposium. The authors mentioned below build on their blogs and provide a scholarly lens for understanding some of the most pressing topics surrounding #MeToo in academia.

Knepper, Scutelnicu, and Tekula emphasize the implications of gender harassment, the least recognized form of sexual harassment, and recommend evidence-based guidance for advancing women in the academy to create more equitable and just spaces for teaching and learning in *The Slippery Slope: Struggling for Equity in the Academy in the Era of #MeToo*. Neal, Gherardi, and Olejarski, in *Beyond the Turtle Approach: Women in the Public Sector*, argue that the #MeToo movement has ushered in a new way of thinking and supporting women in public organizations. They advocate for more inclusive mentoring relationships by providing holistic support and intentional mentorships throughout the arc of women's careers and institutional policy changes that support the unique value of women in the public sector and the academy. Johnson and Renderos draw attention to the demographic diversity within the #MeToo movement in *The Invisible Populations*. They ask what happens when the wrong person, that is, people of color, working-class, women, and transgender persons, share their #MeToo experiences. They demonstrate that, when these "wrong persons" do speak out, they are often discredited, marginalized, and silenced.

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This viewpoint addresses two populations often overlooked by the #MeToo Movement, namely, women of color and transgender persons. The viewpoint concludes with recommendations for how the movement can respond to the authors' critiques surrounding diversity and transparency. In *Facing the Giant: A Framework to Undo Sex-Based Discrimination in Academia*, Bishu and Kennedy propose a three-part framework to establish a culture of zero-tolerance of sexual harassment. The intent of framework is for leaders and administrators in academic institutions to adopt this tool to prevent sexual harassment and violence, protect victims from risks of reporting, and set accountability measures to demand justice. An additional approach to preventing sexual harassment and violence is introduced by Dolamore and Richards in *Assessing the Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in an Era of #MeToo*. Their framework, Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct, is a tool to assess an organizational culture's responsiveness to #MeToo. This tool is a starting place for the continued dialogue that is needed to more fully address sexual misconduct on college campuses. In furthering Dolamore and Richards' support for amplified attention to #MeToo, Colvin and Blount-Hill, in *Truth and Reconciliation as a Model for Change #MeToo*, propose a new system of accountability to provide justice for survivors. Namely, they suggest the adoption of a Truth and Reconciliation Model. This model offers a public forum for survivors to testify to the events of their #MeToo experiences and for offenders to admit previous wrongdoing, taking responsibility and asking forgiveness.

The contributions from this Viewpoint provide a strong departure point for more scholarly and practical work

on #MeToo in academia. We must keep challenging the organizational and individual aspects of #MeToo that the authors presented here so richly. For example, future research should examine how to take a proactive approach to avoiding #MeToo experiences in academic institutions. This involves innovative thinking and difficult work at the organizational and individual levels, especially when confronting our own biases and behaviors. Research is not enough however. Scholars should also engage with practitioners in public and nonprofit agencies to understand how to address #MeToo experiences and support survivors when sexual harassment and violence occurs in academia. At conferences, there is a ripe opportunity for training and questioning our own biases and role in furthering a #MeToo culture in academia. Finally, brining #MeToo topics into the classroom will better prepare students and future practitioners for public spaces that openly and honestly admonish sexual harassment and violence. This is no small charge, and we thank the authors of both our Women in the Public Sector blog series and this Viewpoint Symposium for their thoughtful efforts to begin this agenda.

References

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