

## #METOO—NOW WHAT?

### Supporting Survivors and Beyond

When the African American activist Tarana Burke coined the phrase “me too” in 2006, she was seeking to give victims of sexual violence a voice, and a way to relate to each other. She calls this “empowerment through empathy”: when survivors exchange that phrase, they say to each other, “I believe you, I know what you are going through.” In a culture that systematically disbelieves victims of sexual violence, that one phrase in and of itself wields immense power.<sup>1</sup> Burke’s organization was set up to help and support survivors of sexual violence, particularly young women of color in her community, and later expanded its remit to people of all genders and ages. With its newfound global visibility, Burke has expressed concerns that the message of the #MeToo movement is getting derailed and diluted.<sup>2</sup>

As is the nature of many social and political movements in the age of social media, #MeToo is not so much one single, unified force, as millions of diverse, independent voices in dialogue with each other. As a result, it does not necessarily offer one single or cohesive solution to the problem of sexual violence. But there are some key strands emerging from the countless conversations and discussions. As Tarana Burke has repeatedly reminded us, a focus on supporting victims and survivors of sexual violence is crucial. Not only that, but we need to ensure the most vulnerable and marginalized of victims are at the center of these efforts.

But to eradicate sexual violence, to dismantle rape culture and build a culture of consent, we need to work toward fundamental social change. #MeToo has enabled survivors—silenced and stigmatized for years—to speak out in public. But the stigma is still there, and the disbelief and silencing have not gone away. There *are* indications that some things are changing. It has become slightly (but only slightly) harder to dismiss victims. Some (but only some) perpetrators are being made to face consequences. There has been some (limited) change in legislation and in legal practitioners' approach to sexual violence cases. And the issue of consent—what it is, how it works—has made headlines (some positive, others less so). Discussions of consent have also raised the question of power—both the obvious abuses of power of people like Harvey Weinstein

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and Donald Trump, and the more insidious, day-to-day operations of power that we looked at in chapter 4.

All of which begs the question: Where do we go from here? What does long-term, sustainable, meaningful change look like? How do we dismantle rape culture? How do we build a culture of consent? And what are the pitfalls along the way?

Rape culture and the pervasiveness of sexual violence in our society are underpinned by both legal and cultural factors. As we have seen, feminist legal theorists have long argued that the law treats rape like a property crime rather than something that infringes on our autonomy, integrity, and basic humanity. They have also pointed out other issues with legislation, as well as the way the law is put into practice, that ultimately lead to a failure on the part of the criminal justice system to tackle sexual violence. At the same time, rape myths, the pushing or ignoring of boundaries, discourses about what “normal” sex looks like, who gets to have it and how, are pervasive in our culture. In some cases, they outright limit how meaningful and free our consent can be. In others, these operations of power subtly shape our desires and behaviors in ways that are toxic and harmful. And of course there are countless survivors of sexual violence who need support, healing, and justice. So if we want to achieve meaningful change and dismantle rape culture, we have to tackle all these areas.

## Legal Reform

The importance of legal reform has historically been contested in feminist legal theory and campaigning. On the one hand, a series of campaigns have achieved gains such as the criminalization of marital rape and improvements to how the criminal justice system treats victims and survivors. On the other hand, these changes have not necessarily resulted either in a higher conviction rate for sexual violence or in a reduction of sexual violence. There are also serious questions to be asked about the overall role of the criminal justice system in reproducing multiple other forms of oppression in addition to rape culture. Legal reform, therefore, cannot be the only pillar of a campaign for lasting change, but there are specific changes we may want to see implemented to bring the criminal justice system closer to a state where it is fit for purpose when it comes to sexual violence.

The legal definition of rape is one area where change is still needed in many jurisdictions. At the time of writing, only eight European countries recognize all non-consensual sex as rape, and three of these (Germany, Iceland, and Sweden) have only in the last two years changed their laws to remove certain factors, such as additional force or physical resistance on the part of the victim, from the definition.<sup>3</sup> French law requires violence, constraint, threat, or surprise rather than the absence of consent

to recognize a rape. Norwegian law requires violence or threats, or the victim to be incapable of resisting, as does Swiss law. In most European countries, no does not mean no. Working toward consent-centric definitions of rape and other sexual offenses, therefore, is a vital step in improving the criminal justice system's handling of sexual violence. Additionally, where consent-centric definitions of rape exist, they need to consider the realities of consent negotiation and the operations of power in our society. Requiring affirmative consent—a clear yes rather than the absence of no—should be a key part of such definitions, as should the ability to withdraw consent at any time.

Yet even in jurisdictions with consent-centric definitions of rape, victims who report rape and sexual assault to the police continue to be mistreated and re-traumatized by the criminal justice system, while their attackers frequently get away. Feminist campaigners have achieved a number of improvements in the treatment of victims by the law across many jurisdictions. In the United Kingdom, for instance, these include anonymity for complainants, changes to the way they can be asked to appear in court, such as testifying behind a screen, and a ban on discussing complainants' sexual history as part of the trial (with certain exemptions).

But the experience of reporting sexual assault and testifying in court remains traumatic. In a high-profile trial of two professional rugby players and two other men in

Northern Ireland in 2018, the complainant was asked to give evidence over eight days and was cross-examined by four separate defense lawyers, to jeers and laughter from the public gallery in the courtroom. The defense argued, among other things, that the victim's lack of physical resistance or screaming indicated consent, and that her internal injuries were no clear proof of vaginal intercourse having taken place. Despite this ordeal and the harrowing details of the case, all four defendants were acquitted.<sup>4</sup>

Further reforms to how sexual assault victims are treated by the criminal justice system—from reporting to trial and beyond—are therefore urgently needed. Victims are let down in many jurisdictions, in one way at least, because they are not actually represented by a legal team. Rather, in countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada, victims act as a witness for the prosecution. This drastically limits the support available to them and thrusts them into a hostile and confrontational environment with little preparation; defense lawyers are trained to use such situations to their own advantage. As a result, rape myths, and particularly myths about what does and does not constitute consent, continue to be reproduced in courtrooms, as happened in the Northern Irish rugby case.<sup>5</sup> Even where consent-centric legal definitions of rape exist, in the hands of a skilled defense lawyer pitted against an unsupported victim, consent becomes a meaningless concept. Support for victims throughout the legal process,

from professionals who have had comprehensive training on issues of consent, rape culture, and rape myths, could make a significant difference here.

Another key area of victims' interaction with the criminal justice system in need of improvement is the collection and processing of forensic evidence. There is a perception that DNA evidence is key to the outcome of rape trials, and as a result victims who report rape to the police, particularly those who do so soon after it has occurred, are routinely asked to submit to rape kit examinations. Rape kit processes are invasive and can be traumatic, especially following already existing trauma. Yet over the last ten years it has emerged that the United States has a rape kit backlog (forensic evidence that has been collected but either not sent in for analysis or not analyzed by the lab in a timely manner) in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>6</sup>

It is also questionable to what extent rape kit evidence makes a difference to the outcome of rape trials at all. Although it can potentially help identify an unknown attacker, the vast majority of victims of sexual assault know the perpetrator. Moreover, forensic evidence rarely has anything to say about the key issue of consent. So, although in some cases it may prove that sexual contact with a particular person occurred, it cannot shed any light on whether that contact was consensual or not. Rape kits have a minimal if any impact on the outcome of the



vast majority of rape cases.<sup>7</sup> Rethinking both the need for and the process of forensic evidence collection would therefore be a key step in improving the treatment of victims by the law.

Any legal reform campaign on sexual violence needs to examine as well how the legal system reproduces not only rape culture but also other existing forms of oppression, such as racism, heteronormativity and queerphobia, and other social inequalities, which affect the treatment of both victims and defendants. Domestic and sexual violence where victim and perpetrator are of the same gender is one area where dominant ideas about gender and what such violence looks like are reproduced. Police and prosecutors may not believe victims whose attacker is of the same gender, or they may blame and stigmatize the victims further.<sup>8</sup>

Rape victims from poorer backgrounds, as well as black and brown victims, also struggle to get their cases prosecuted. Police and prosecutors are more likely to probe their criminal records and question their credibility.<sup>9</sup> As a result, many victims are reluctant to report their experiences to the police in the first place: in the United States, 80 percent of reported rapes are reported by white women, despite the fact that white people make up 64 percent of the US population, and that black, indigenous, and mixed-race women are more likely to be assaulted than white women.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, black, brown and/or Muslim men are more likely to be prosecuted, especially for sexual violence against white women, than white men, and their violence is more likely to be publicly linked to their race or religion. One member of parliament in the United Kingdom in 2017 claimed that men of Pakistani origin were disproportionately involved in “grooming gangs,” yet evidence of that is inconclusive at best.<sup>11</sup> The law, and its uses by those in power, is far from neutral in the ways it is applied, in sexual violence cases and beyond, and in the face of that consent becomes a secondary concern.

The criminal justice system has a long history not only of letting down victims of sexual violence but also of reproducing other forms of oppression and inequalities. This needs to be addressed before it can be considered fit for purpose in dealing with issues of sexual violence. In the longer term, a focus on transformative justice rather than punishment may be a significantly more appropriate way for the law to tackle sexual violence than its current approaches.

## Cultural Change

Legal reform alone (whether in terms of legislation or legal practice) cannot dismantle rape culture or create a culture of consent. To do that, we need to address the role that

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culture plays in reproducing rape myths and dominant ideas about sex, gender, and power. It may be tempting to think that consent is a matter of individuals negotiating their desires and boundaries, but in a rape-supportive cultural environment such negotiation is frequently not conducted freely or on equal terms. Culture here can mean both popular culture such as music, television, or films, and our day-to-day practices and the beliefs we hold about everything from personal and collective responsibility to what behaviors are appropriate for people of what genders.

One starting point for cultural transformation is to expand our idea of consent beyond the sexual. A true culture of consent would permeate our lives in everyday situations and interactions outside the bedroom. This can apply to how we interact within our friendship groups and families, with our colleagues, and with complete strangers. We have probably all nagged our friends to join us for an outing they would have rather missed. We may have been put in awkward situations that demanded we hugged people we would have rather stayed away from. At the same time, most of us do not have access to the scripts to ask for consent in social situations, or to respond to such requests. We need to find ways of normalizing offering someone a hug (as well as them accepting or refusing that offer). We need to become more attentive to refusals, whether they are subtle or direct.

A second key building block of consent culture is becoming attentive to and dismantling the operations of power through discourse that prop up rape culture. We need to better understand how compulsory sexuality operates and is leveraged against marginalized groups. We also need to continue interrogating traditional gender roles and dominant discourses about sexuality, and dismantle dominant ideas about what “normal” sex looks like, what “counts” as sex, and how we “should” be having sex.

Another important area to consider in terms of cultural practices is what we teach children and young people about bodily autonomy and consent in day-to-day life—both through conversations and formal education, but also through how we treat them. Very young children’s bodily autonomy, for instance, is severely limited both by their own abilities and by some of our social norms around what is and is not appropriate in interacting with a child. Of course, sometimes finding a balance between giving as much autonomy as possible to children and caring for them can be hard. Brushing teeth, taking medicine, wearing clothing appropriate for the weather, and visits to the doctor or dentist can be an autonomy minefield. But even ostensibly more innocuous activities, such as expressing affection for a child or asking them to express their affection for others can send the wrong messages. Starting with the principle of bodily

autonomy in mind means taking more time and care to explain to children why some things might be necessary, taking the time to understand why they may not want certain things, and finding creative solutions where there is conflict.

We also need to recognize that there are structural issues that prevent parents and caregivers from doing these things. Busy schedules and stressful lives do not always leave us enough time to give children the care and attention they deserve. Social structures and institutions of the state do not always look kindly on parents who give their children autonomy in clothing choices—especially if those parents and children are members of marginalized groups. Formal education is frequently structured in ways that severely limit autonomy, and parents and caregivers have to find ways to counteract or compromise with that. A true consent culture would seek to address the root causes of these issues and enable parents, caregivers, and communities more generally to care for children in ways that foster a strong sense of bodily autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

Our formal education systems also need to address consent. Compulsory, comprehensive, and inclusive sex and relationships education at all levels that not only covers but also centers consent is only a starting point here. We also need to interrogate how the structures of our educational systems impact individual autonomy, and how gendered differences in the treatment of children and

young people in schools may reproduce rape culture. Common pedagogical practices such as assigned seating (and especially “boy, girl” seating, which assumes that girls will exert a moderating influence on boys’ behavior) potentially force children into close contact with others whom they would prefer not to associate with, and they reproduce cultural practices that make women and girls responsible for the behavior of men and boys. School uniforms and dress codes similarly remove children’s autonomy and limit their ability for self-expression. Challenging and reforming these structures will take time but is vital for creating a culture of consent.

Beyond everyday cultural practices, popular culture is a key vehicle for reproducing ideas about gender, sexuality, and consent, and therefore it, too, has a key role to play in dismantling rape culture and creating a culture of consent. The revelation that propelled the #MeToo movement to mainstream awareness was the sheer number and severity of sexual assault allegations against the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. This was then compounded by similar allegations against a number of other high-profile figures within the entertainment industry, in turn reinforcing that those who produce our mainstream popular culture are steeped in rape culture, and are in fact frequently themselves perpetrators of sexual violence. We need to examine who produces our culture, and look for and reward more diversity, both behind the scenes and on

screen or page. Allowing a variety of experiences and viewpoints to be represented in our mainstream culture gives us a much better chance to explore issues of consent in positive and constructive ways.

One of the most important contributions popular culture can make toward a culture of consent is to give us the social scripts that normalize everyday consent-centric interactions: show parents respecting children's bodily autonomy, or friends offering hugs (but not imposing them on each other). Another is to help us rewrite the dominant sexual script by introducing more variety in the way sex is depicted: include more queer people, show more consent negotiation (and consent withdrawal being respected), find ways to challenge the privileged position of penile-vaginal intercourse in our society—and do it in content aimed at all ages, from Disney blockbusters and PG-13 fade-to-black scenes to hardcore pornography. (If *Deadpool* can do it, others can too!)

These are just some of the first steps toward the kind of cultural transformation we need to dismantle rape culture and create a culture of consent. Together with legal reform and support for victims and survivors, they are a start. But we also need to understand how rape culture is embedded in our wider social and power structures, and therefore where resistance to such change may come from and what it may look like.



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## Resistance to Change

Rape culture is part of a wider set of systems of power and oppression. Patriarchy, capitalism, racism, ableism, cis- and heteronormativity, and compulsory sexuality—and the people who benefit from these systems—all rely on a culture that obscures and dismisses boundary violations, that uses sexuality to construct some of us as less or more human than others, that blames and re-traumatizes the victims of sexual violence while enabling perpetrators. Oppressive systems have a long history of resisting change, and a range of tactics available to them for doing so.

Historically, rape culture has been reproduced through the silencing and blaming of victims, but also through some of our culture's dominant ideas about gender and sex, such as the male sexual drive discourse or compulsory sexuality. The more a system of oppression can convince us that its operation is “natural,” the more invisible it becomes and less resistance it is likely to encounter. It has taken decades of persistent feminist campaigning, activism, and knowledge development to get to a point where we now recognize the ubiquity of sexual violence and the cultural environment that enables it. The #MeToo movement, and the public attention it has gained, is the current high-water mark of these activities.

So when silencing and normalization of rape culture no longer work, what other tactics for resisting change are

we likely to see employed against the #MeToo movement or against anyone seeking to build a culture of consent? Both feminist and other liberation movements are familiar with tactics such as backlash, co-optation, and placation. We are already seeing signs of these, as those who benefit from rape culture seek to find a way to limit the effects of any demands for change.

Anti-feminist backlash is of course nothing new. Every big demand that women's movements have made, from the vote to workplace and reproductive rights, has seen backlash ranging from ridicule to violence. Backlash can come from the state (think for instance of the incarceration and force-feeding of suffragettes) as well as from non-state groups and individuals (like organized anti-suffrage movements).

Backlash against campaigns on issues of sexual violence also has a long history that predates the recent rise of the #MeToo movement. In 1991, for instance, a feminist group at Antioch College in the United States succeeded in raising awareness of issues of campus rape and date rape. In response, the college changed its policy and student handbook to better protect students. It could discipline and expel students who violated or sexually assaulted other students, and its definition of sexual assault focused specifically on continuous verbal consent: as intimacy progressed, partners were obliged to verbally ensure consent was still present.

As media picked up the news of the policy, it became a topic of national conversation in the United States in the early 1990s.<sup>13</sup> The vast majority of mainstream opinions were extremely negative, as seen for instance in the 1993 *Saturday Night Live* sketch “Is It Date Rape?,” which features, among other things, a male student exaggeratedly asking a female student if it is OK to compliment her on her halter top, kiss her on the mouth, or touch her buttocks.<sup>14</sup> This and other commentary on Antioch’s policy are examples of backlash through ridicule. They suggested that a focus on consent in sexual interactions was an unrealistic expectation, that verbally checking for consent would “ruin the mood” and make sex less spontaneous or even less “natural.”

While mainstream media has not been quite so crass in the wake of the #MeToo campaign, the underlying discourse of ridicule that constructs consent negotiation as legalistic, too complex, or sucking all the fun out of sex has indeed been a staple of more recent commentators’ repertoire. As tapes of then-candidate Donald Trump boasting of grabbing women “by the pussy” were made public leading up to the 2016 US presidential election, US talk radio host Rush Limbaugh produced a five-minute diatribe ridiculing the notion of consent as the arbiter of what was permissible in sexual behavior,<sup>15</sup> and referring to anyone who agreed with this view as the “rape police.” There has also been an outbreak of male celebrities asking if they are

allowed to flirt anymore, or suggesting that drawing attention to the pervasive nature of sexual violence is “criminalizing courtship.”<sup>16</sup>

But the current wave of backlash goes beyond ridicule. A number of powerful men in business and politics, including US vice president Mike Pence, have indicated that they will not take one-on-one meetings with women, lest they be accused of sexual harassment.<sup>17</sup> The subtext here is clear: if women continue to make trouble about this, they will face consequences for their careers and livelihoods. And then there is, of course, the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the United States Supreme Court, despite Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony under oath accusing him of attempted rape. This is backlash from the highest levels of the state itself. So, although the media backlash against #MeToo is in some ways more subtle than that against Antioch College’s sexual offense prevention program, it is very much still there, still seeking to reproduce rape culture in the same ways, with added help from the state.

Co-optation is another strategy that systems of oppression frequently employ against the demands of liberation movements. Co-optation involves accepting some of the demands for change, or even elevating certain individuals from within liberation movements, while using them to further other agendas or even undermine more radical calls for action. Practices like greenwashing (corporations

or governments claiming to be environmentally friendly in marketing or policy materials while engaging in environmentally destructive practices) or pinkwashing (claiming to be LGBT-friendly, or using discourses around LGBT rights to justify oppressing other groups) are examples of this strategy.

Pinkwashing can, for instance, involve pitting the rights of LGBT people against those of ethnic and religious minorities. Countries like the Netherlands that historically have prided themselves on their openness and tolerance of sexual minorities, have come under critique for using that tolerance as a way to justify the exclusion of non-white or Muslim migrants on the spurious grounds of a lack of shared values. And while LGBT rights campaigns, such as those for marriage equality, have seen some success across a number of Western jurisdictions, issues that affect more vulnerable queer people, such as poverty, racism, transphobia, and youth homelessness, are not tackled by states that claim to be LGBT-friendly. So by acquiescing to a limited set of demands for change, states have co-opted LGBT rights campaigns in ways that both continue to oppress queer people and reproduce other forms of oppression such as racism and Islamophobia.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, we are already beginning to see the co-optation of the #MeToo movement and other campaigns against sexual violence. Both in Europe and in the United States, right-wing politicians have used discourses

around protecting women from sexual violence to justify anti-immigrant policies. US president Donald Trump, for instance, has referred to Mexican migrants as “rapists,” and a series of sexual assaults at New Year’s Eve celebrations in Germany in 2015 fed already smoldering Islamophobic and anti-migrant attitudes, turning them into policy. While the same incidents were a prompt for Germany to change its legal definition of rape to a consent-centric one, they also led to legislation making it easier to deport migrant people. Rather than tackling rape culture and sexual violence, these actions scapegoat minorities and reproduce racial oppression and violence.

There are also indications that the #MeToo movement is being undermined through placation: ensuring that a select few perpetrators face consequences instead of looking at wider, systemic changes. We can see this, for instance, in who exactly is facing consequences for alleged sexual harassment and violence and who is not. Two specific cases that warrant closer examination are that of the US comedian Bill Cosby and the actor Kevin Spacey.

Cosby’s conviction in April 2018 on three counts of indecent assault of the same woman was celebrated as the first post-#MeToo case to deliver justice to a victim. Yet the case predates the #MeToo movement. Cosby was charged in 2015 for a sexual assault he committed in 2004. In June 2017, the jury on the original case was deadlocked for five days, leading to a mistrial being declared. In the second

trial, conducted in a post-#MeToo environment, the judge allowed five of Cosby's other accusers to testify, and these testimonies are credited with significantly contributing to the conviction. To an extent, this does demonstrate a change in public perception of sexual violence, yet it is also notable that it took six women testifying, with countless others speaking out publicly, to secure this one conviction.

The other prominent figure to have faced definite consequences as a result of sexual assault allegations at the time of writing is Kevin Spacey. The actor Anthony Rapp accused Spacey of sexually assaulting him when Rapp was 14. Spacey unsuccessfully attempted to deflect the allegations by coming out as gay. He was dropped almost immediately from his starring role in Netflix's already-flagging original series *House of Cards* and has been nearly universally condemned by the media.

It is interesting that the two men for whom post-#MeToo justice (in one case through the legal system, in the other through severe career consequences) has been swift are a black man and a gay man. At the same time, Johnny Depp, against whom there are credible and corroborated allegations of domestic violence, continues to be cast in high-profile roles and be used in advertising by corporations such as Warner Bros., Disney, and Dior. And away from Hollywood, Brett Kavanaugh has been appointed to the United States Supreme Court despite equally credible allegations of attempted rape.



This is not to say that Cosby and Spacey should not have suffered consequences for their actions—they absolutely should. Yet given the enormous and growing list of men accused of sexual misconduct just within the entertainment industry, it is notable that the meting out of consequences appears to be reproducing patterns of privilege and oppression. The danger here is that rather than radical, systemic change and a dismantling of rape culture, all we will get is a few heads on platters, in the hope that we will go away.

Some feminist, liberal, and left-wing commentators have also suggested that the #MeToo movement is leading to a sex panic. They raise two key concerns. The first is that a focus on sexual violence may contribute to an atmosphere where sex is increasingly policed, enabling more reactionary and conservative ideas about sex to thrive while having an oppressive effect on queer people and non-normative sexual practices. The second concern is that in dealing with allegations of sexual violence and misconduct, due process and the law seem to have been circumvented in a number of cases—for instance, in Kevin Spacey’s—with alleged perpetrators being suspended or fired from their jobs.<sup>19</sup>

Yet in both cases, these are not really problems with raising awareness of and demanding justice for sexual violence. Rather, they are expressions of resistance to change, and structural issues within the criminal justice

system and our social and cultural attitudes to sexual violence. Using the #MeToo movement to police queer and non-normative sex and sexualities would be an example of co-optation, and is definitely an issue we need to remain vigilant for. As to due process and the law, even commentators wary of circumventing it, like Masha Gessen, admit that the law does not treat sexual violence in the same way as other crimes, and that the standard of proof in sexual violence cases is effectively higher. We need to be wary of holding up the law as the ultimate arbiter of sexual violence and consent. Here, a focus on supporting survivors and working toward long-term cultural change, while de-centering the law and looking toward transformative justice, would arguably be better approaches.

### Where Next?

The #MeToo movement is an expression of momentum gathered through decades of feminist activism. It has brought to public attention the pervasiveness of sexual violence, and how our culture enables and reproduces such violence on a daily basis. At the same time, it, and other feminist activism over the years, has pointed toward what a culture of consent might look like and highlighted the need for cultural and legal reform, as well as support for victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Yet we are also already seeing signs of resistance against #MeToo and other attempts to build a culture of consent from those who benefit from rape culture. Backlash, co-optation, and placation are all at work, derailing calls for the dismantling of rape culture and a centering of consent, using sexual violence as a pretext to reproduce other forms of oppression, and finding ways to shore up the discourses and social relations that rape culture is built on.

Social change is rarely as radical as those who initiate it would like it to be. Systems of power are difficult to dismantle, and it takes time—sometimes centuries—to do so. Progress is rarely linear, and setbacks are inevitable. More likely than not, the #MeToo movement will make some headway in some areas, but it will also be accommodated in ways that do not lead to the radical, systemic, structural transformation a true culture of consent would require. But the value of making sexual violence, consent, and issues of power a conversation we are all having, rather than one that is happening in activist groups and niche corners of the internet alone, cannot be underestimated. And while social change is slow, it is not impossible. It requires persistence, celebrating small victories, keeping an eye on the end goal. It requires vigilance against the ways our movement can be derailed, co-opted, or placated before we reach that end goal. And it requires us all to practice a culture of consent at every opportunity in our own day-to-day lives.



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# Sexual Consent

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