Me Too: The Effects of Sexual Harassment and Assault in the Entertainment Industry

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By Cassandra Gaal

As times have changed, and technology advances, very few things remain consistent through these changes. From the creation of cell phones and the internet, to how popular music has changed throughout the decades, much of what was relevant in the past has been altered and changed to concur with society's current climate, specifically what is acceptable or not in today's world. In the United States, the entertainment industry has undergone several major adjustments in an attempt to stay with the current trends. With the increase in usage of Spotify and Apple Music in the music industry and with streaming services becoming a popular way to consume movies and TV shows, the entertainment industry is staying up to speed with the technology changes. However, the entertainment industry has recently come under fire from people within about working conditions and how people, particularly women, are being sexualized, sexually abused, and mistreated by the men in power. Women in the industry, along with people all over the country, are standing up and using their voices to fight against the over-sexualization and mistreatment of women not only in the industry, but in the general population as well. The "Me Too" movement began in 2006 by Tarana Burke. [1] It was started as a way to empower African American women of all ages after being victimized by sexual assault. In 2017, Alyssa Milano used the hashtag to bring forward the sexual harassment she endured. Since then, the movement has brought together women in the entertainment industry who had been sexually harassed and abused. As the movement has grown, more people of all genders, sexualities, and backgrounds

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[1] https://metoomvmt.org/about/#history

have come forward to share their story of mistreatment.[2] The "Me Too" movement is bringing light to the idea that the entertainment industry is creating a rape culture by portraying men as romantic while using aggressive behavior, using lyrics and music videos to sexualize women, and how the advancements in media have not only created a platform where people may degrade women more readily, but also a platform where women are able to share their story and find others who support and understand where they are coming from.

Aggression Seen as Romance

From film and television, to the more recent YouTube and streaming services like Netflix, women have been portrayed as "helpless" or in need of a man. Media has spread the message that women need to be convinced of a need for affection from men. Current television shows and movies, and even shows from decades ago, show male characters being forceful in their approach of obtaining the women they desire. For example, in the classic Disney movie, *Snow White*, the Prince kisses Snow White while she is asleep. In movies such as *The Last Song*, Will forcefully kisses Ronnie as a way to shut her up and end the argument they were having. While both of these have been labeled as "romantic" by the media, neither of these were consensual. While the end result can be interpreted as positive and romantic, as in both cases the couples end up together, the idea that men, or women, could get what they want by forcing themselves on another person has influenced the way people in today's society perceive consent. In the article, "Romance or Sexual Assault: Ambiguity of Sexual Consent in the Media and How Yes Means Yes Legislation Can Help," the author, Courtney Anne Gronszhans, makes the point

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[2] https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2018/10/05/alyssa-milano-concert-sexual-assault-19-punched-metoo/1532125002/

that, "The man's role in romantic comedies is described as "taking the lead," the man is usually the one that "rescues" the female, that ultimately "fights" for her." [3]

The idea of the man being the one to have to fight for the girl rings true for many genres. In the romantic comedy genre, the aggressiveness the male lead asserts is associated with comedic relief, allowing for viewers to find it funny and laughable, instead of forceful and harmful. It is written and directed this way in order to avoid viewers and consumers from seeing what is truly being displayed. While it may be completely unintentional by movie and television directors, society has allowed for movies to have the romance shown in such ways, while consumers, critics, and other movie and TV goers may not notice the forceful behavior. Along with that, other genres, such as just romantic, children's, or even horror, have allowed for similar aggressive behavior to be displayed. The idea that men are "fighting" for the girl, and saving her, is common in fairytale storylines, such as *Sleeping Beauty*. In that story, Aurora is under the spell of the witch, which can only be broken by "true love's kiss." When Prince Phillip reaches Aurora, he kisses her while she is not conscious and able to give consent. The movie and story all follow the idea that she can only be woken by "True Love's Kiss," but by her true love kissing her to wake her up, he is disregarding her desire to be kissed by him. Movies like this one have created an image of romance by showing women that the man needs to take control. *Sleeping Beauty* is not a new story, which shows how this idea of a man being in control and a woman does not need to give consent has been long standing. It also shows young children that the woman should accept a man who kisses her when she doesn't consent. The movie, and others similar to it, replace consent culture with early stages of rape culture.

Reality TV's Harmful Effects

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[3] "Romance or Sexual Assault: Ambiguity of Sexual Consent in the Media and How Yes Means Yes Legislation Can Help."

Legal scholar Courtney Ann Groszhans, writing in the Hastings Women's Law Journal argues that, "For teenagers, there is a proven link between them learning about sexual socialization and the reality television shows that they watch."[4] Some reality shows, such as *Jersey Shore* and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, that depict wild scenes from parties, crazy family relationships, and romantic and legal scandals are watched by young, influential teenagers, showing them what "reality" for the celebrities is like. Teenagers watch these shows and attempt to look and act just like their favorite member of the show. The thought of teenagers spending time watching television and film, only to have what celebrities are depicting as "reality" coming across their screen is concerning. There are many instances of reality stars going wild on the show, throwing things, having tantrums, cheating, and more, creating the aggressive and unrealistic environments teens seek in their own lives. As the teenagers and young adults watch, they strive to be what they see, making aggressive and sexual behavior of young people increase, and teaching younger audiences that aggressive behavior is acceptable in romantic relationships.

Society has allowed for many shows, movies, shorts, and more to create this kind of "romantic" behavior, and practically force feed it to children and teenagers. Many teenagers, and even younger, are imagining these "romantic" gestures to be the normal way of acting around someone they are interested in, causing discomfort or difficult situations. When looking at shows on TV today that teenagers are watching, such as cartoons, ABC Family, and others, many of these shows use the depiction of no consent, or forceful romance, and children and teenagers watch the shows, brainwashing them into believing aggressive romantic behavior is ok.

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4 "Romance or Sexual Assault: Ambiguity of Sexual Consent in the Media and How Yes Means Yes Legislation Can Help."

The shows and movies that put the idea that forcefully kissing a woman, or trapping her to fall in love, and spin it to use as a learning lesson could actually create a learning lesson if they took the aggressive behavior and showed the victim visibly uncomfortable or someone else stepping in to save the victim, and not having the woman fall for the hero. For example, television drama *The Fosters* has plenty of scenes throughout the span of the show depicting rape, sexual harassment, aggressive and unsafe sexual and romantic situations, and show what ways a person can get through the situation, or how to respond in the moment and letting someone know. Since teenagers learn from what they watch, more shows and movies need to show how to properly handle those situations instead of romanticizing them.

<div style="text-align:center;">Women are Oversexualized</div>

In the article "'I Don't Care About You as a Person': Sexual Minority Women Objectified" by Elliot A. Tebbe, Kathleen E. Connelly, Bonnie Moradi, Alexandra L. Lenzen, and Mirella Flores, the idea of beauty standards, and how women use the way others react towards them is mentioned in the quote, "Pressures to conform to femininity norms reflected pressures to be feminine through attire, makeup, behaviors, and roles. Compliments/positive reinforcements for meeting standards of beauty differed from the aforementioned subthemes in that it specifically reflected positive attention as a mechanism for promoting adoption of sociocultural standards of beauty."[5] As women in the world, the "ideal beauty standards" can be seen across all platforms, from television to social media to magazines. While those standards have changed over time, the visibility of them has remained consistent. The author uses the idea of beauty standards to point out the fact that women are more likely to conform to beauty standards when their peers, and especially men, compliment them and give positive feedback

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[5] "I Don't Care About You as a Person": Sexual Minority Women Objectified."

when the women do something different. This feeds into the above topic of men who are acting in a somewhat aggressive manner being perceived as romantic. The peers of these women, intentionally or not, are creating a mildly aggressive habit, where when a person changes, or meets a beauty standard, the compliments and positive reinforcement are used as a way to encourage women to continue with the beauty standard or change.

Sexualization of Female Recording Artists

Women have not only been sexualized and objectified in television and film, but they have been sexualized in music as well. In genres across the world, women's bodies have become sexual objects, and the industry has allowed for women to become sexualized. In rap and hip hop, the lyrics describe women in inappropriate ways, using slang, profanity, and generally uncomfortable language. However, men are not the only people portraying women in that light. While men are seen as the primary source for women being sexualized, women are also contributing to how they are perceived. Women in the rap and hip-hop game have played a large part in the growth of the sexualization of women. With artists like Nicki Minaj and Beyoncé, the body of a woman, especially a woman of color, has been portrayed as a tiny waist, large hips and booty, and a large chest. Because both Beyoncé and Nicki both have this body shape, it is becoming a desired body shape for women to have from the male's point of view. The history of black females being used for their bodies, and creating the "ideal image" of a black woman's body has been practiced for hundreds of years. In the article "The Bad Bitch Barbie Craze and Beyoncé African American Women's Bodies as Commodities in Hip-Hop Culture, Images, and Media" by Crystal LaVoulle & Tisha Lewis Ellison, the history of black females is discussed by saying, "sold to a traveling circus, her naked body was paraded in front of Whites, and was used

to justify claims that Black women were genetically inferior and sexually primitive."[6] By saying this, the article is providing the message that, for centuries, black women have been seen as sexual objects just from their body. The large bottom, and skinny waist create a sexually appealing look to the women, resulting in what is now an over sexual "ideal" body image.

Rap and hip hop are not the only genre where women are objectified and sexualized. Pop music has also played a role in the oversexualizing of women in the Music Industry. Artists such as Katy Perry, Carly Rae Jepsen, and Meghan Trainor have all contributed to pop music being sexualized. Their lyrics and videos to their songs give off a somewhat sexual impression, allowing for their bodies to be what sells their music. This message is highlighted in the article "I Might Get Your Heart Racing in My Skin-Tight Jeans": Sexualization on Music Entertainment Television." written by Laura Vandenbosch, Dorien Vervloessem, and Steven Eggermont. The authors talk about how music videos are affecting the objectification of women by saying, "It may be argued that the format of music videos is more likely than other television genres to enable sexualization. The short format of music videos and their strong focus on performers' dance moves or physical actions may place the sexual appeal or behavior of the portrayed characters at a central place and may invite gazing at their bodies more strongly."[7] Music videos are one of the easiest ways to display the sexualization and objectification of women, since they are dressed in provocative clothes and dancing in what can be considered sexual and inappropriate. For example, Katy Perry's video "Teenage Dream" has several scenes where the two characters are in a hotel room in an obviously sexual scene. The scene, while there is no actual nudity, has a definite message about sex and hooking up with someone, which is not only

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[6] "The Bad Bitch Barbie Craze and Beyoncé African American Women's Bodies as Commodities in Hip-Hop Culture, Images, and Media"
[7] "I Might Get Your Heart Racing in My Skin-Tight Jeans": Sexualization on Music Entertainment Television."

creating a more objectifying world for women, but sending messages about sex as a teenager to young girls. Other music videos, such as Carly Rae Jepsen's video "Call Me Maybe" depicts the idea that the way to catch a man's eye is to be sexy in everything you do. She is washing a car in minimal amounts of clothes, and while the guy isn't interested, it still portrays women as needing to dress sexily to get the guy they want.

Meghan Trainor has released several songs with sexual undertones to them. Her song "All About That Bass," while fun and easy to mistake for a song about body positivity, is actually talking about her booty, and how boys will like her better because of it. The lyric "She says, 'Boys like a little more booty to hold at night'," gives the impression that boys are more interested in girls with more voluptuous bottoms compared to other girls that have a little less to give in that area. Another song where Meghan has sexual messages is "Walkashame." The title of the song insinuates a walk of shame, or the walk back home after a one-night stand. Going into the lyrics, the message from the song is that doing a walk of shame is not a bad thing. While Meghan Trainor may not have intended for the song to be seen as a way to sexualize women, the song sexualizes women. The idea that women have to do the "walk of shame," and calling it a walk of shame implies that women should not be having sexual relations; there is something shameful about women having sex. The music, while fun and upbeat, has created a sexualized environment for women. Women listen, and want to be Meghan Trainor, since she is seen as sexy and confident. Men listen, and want women to be Meghan, since she has the booty, and is sexy and confident. Women want to be seen doing the walk of shame, even though men see it as shameful and embarrassing. Meghan's songs, along with others across all genres, often sexualize women, while also stripping them of their ability to have sexual relations without it being shameful or embarrassing.

Beyoncé, demonstrates the characteristics of a "Bad Bitch Barbie," which is a term that refers to a black woman who stands and fights for what she believes in, while also keeping her opinion strong and standing her ground. Beyoncé is one of the many in the industry who is working towards equality of women, and especially black women, using her strong personality and performances, as well as her music, all while being sexualized and objectified like many other black artists. The article explains hip-hop feminism as efforts made by many current artists, as well as the industry, to work towards the de-sexualizing of women in the Hip Hop, Rap, R&B genres. The article states, "Hip-hop feminism gives voice to years of dominating opposition, sexism, and discourses that attempt to dis-empower women of color and render them powerless in the utilization of their own bodies." The Bad Bitch Barbie viewpoint is beginning the fight by black women towards reversing all of what society has deemed acceptable, and giving these women a way to utilize their platform as an artist or creator to acknowledge that they need to be powerful and not accept any more criticism regarding their body. These women are using the Bad Bitch Barbie idea, and turning it into a positive, women-empowering message about body types, sexualization of women, and what is and is not okay for people to believe about black women and their bodies. While Beyoncé, and other mainstream artists, have become the face of the Bad Bitch Barbie movement, women in general are using this name to stop sexualizing all women of color, and not just those in entertainment.

Technology

As technology has changed, the way people consume media has changed as well. In today's society, almost everyone has access to movies, television shows, videos, and social media all day, every day, with the device in their pocket. Compared to 50 years ago, when most stories were word of mouth, or television or radio shows, where there was more censorship in the

media, today's media provides easier access to the content and less censorship. As a result of all of the changes made to media and technology, changes to how women and sex are being portrayed have also occurred. Media has allowed for women to become even more objectified by the lack of censorship within current media and especially on different social media platforms. Along with the objectification of women via social media, and other media outlets, women have been using the same platforms that have been tearing them down for years, to stand up and tell their story to others, and find support and give support to others who have been through similar situations. However, even with the constantly changing technology, women and sexual assault have remained a consistent problem throughout time.

Social Media

Platforms, such as Twitter, have created a space for people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and gender to share their stories as well as give a platform to people who want to support others who have been through sexual assault or harassment. Social media has paved a path for people to express how they are feeling and what they have been through, and as a result has brought people together to bring light to some unspoken topics.

Social media is being used by people who have experienced sexual assault or harassment to tell their story, or show support of others. The "Me Too" movement has been supported by, and used by people of all backgrounds, including celebrities, as a way to share their stories, acknowledge what they have experienced, show support, and be a part of the fight of women, and everyone who has been a victim, especially in the entertainment industry, being protected from workplace harassment. An article titled "It's On Us: The Role of Social Media and Rape Cultuer in Individual Willingness to Mobilize Against Sexual Assualt," in the journal *Mass Communication & Society* written by Cory Armstrong and Jessica Mahone, the authors discuss

the importance of movements similar to the "Me Too" movement, and why the people who are affected by whatever situation they are in should get as much support behind them as possible. This idea is brought up when the author says, "This connection between bystander intervention and protest movements is noteworthy in that it seems that current initiatives to stop slander, discrimination, and bullying for sexual harassment and violence are working, at least currently."[8] The "Me Too" movement, by educating people who may not know how often sexual assault occurs in the entertainment industry or in general, is gaining support from people of all genders, allowing for the fight to lessen the occurrence of sexual harassment in the entertainment industry. The article goes in depth about the lack of knowledge when it comes to workplace harassment, and how to distinguish such harassment from regular interactions. The lack of knowledge on how often sexual harassment occurs, and how many people are affected plays a large role in how others respond to accusations of harassment or assault. As more people learn how widespread harassment and assault are, the more people understand why so many others are standing up and supporting victims who do come forward and report their story.

The movement is also giving so many people a voice to share their story or support others in their battles. This movement is creating a world where people are becoming less afraid to speak up and do something in situations when sexual assault happens, as well as fighting back when the justice system fails a victim. Examples include the Kesha vs Dr. Luke case where Kesha lost to Dr. Luke in court several times but continued to use her testimony to document the abuse she endured. Another was the Senate confirmation hearings of Justice Brett Kavanaugh, at which Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford testified to Kavanaugh's assault of her while both were

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[8] "It's On Us: The Role of Social Media and Rape Cultuer in Individual Willingness to Mobilize Against Sexual Assualt."

undergraduates in college. Both women were criticized by some for their respective cases being reported a long time after the alleged events.

The article "At the Intersection of Social Media and Rape Culture: How Facebook Postings, Texting and Other Personal Communications Challenge the Real Rape Myth in the Criminal Justice System." by Holly Jeanine Boux and Courtenay W. Daum, points out how the justice system works in these situations with the statement, "This is unsurprising because a foundational tenet of socio legal literature is that "law has a distinctly social basis; it both shapes and is shaped by the society in which it operates."[9] Since society now is using the social media platforms to discuss court cases, and how they are ruled, and with people tweeting and posting "Me Too" along with their story anytime a victim is disregarded, the movement takes another step towards bringing attention to how many people are sexually assaulted and why so many go unreported. During the Kavanaugh hearings, many women took to social media to share their stories and reasons why they never came forward after being assaulted or harassed. Dr. Blasey-Ford didn't report the sexual assault against Judge Kavanaugh until over 30 years later. [10] Many people, during the hearings, went to Twitter to share why they, too, didn't report similar traumatic assaults until much later, if ever. Three tweets describing the person's story are provided in the article. In each instance, the victim explains very briefly what happened and why they believed they couldn't report it. These tweets, and the many others similar to them, are bringing light to the fact that it is not easy to come forward, and not everyone feels they can. As was mentioned earlier, Dr. Ford was criticized for Dr. Ford taking so long to report the assault,

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9 "At the Intersection of Social Media and Rape Culture: How Facebook Postings, Texting and Other Personal Communications Challenge the Real Rape Myth in the Criminal Justice System."
10 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/soloish/wp/2018/09/21/trump-asks-why-christine-blasey-ford-didnt-report-her-allegation-sooner-survivors-answer-with-whyididntreport/?utm_term=.9d48287c918c

but in actuality, many people have been told or swayed to the side of not reporting their own assault. Going back to the quote, society has the ability to shape how the law operates. With as many people coming forward now, and people more openly sharing their stories years after the actual event took place, the way the general public perceives sexual assault and the effects it has on people years after the actual event took place. This may, in time, affect the way the law is perceived because these tweets and stories show just how impactful the assault or harassment is, and how hard it is for some people to come forward. The law, however, can be adjusted to accommodate people coming forward. Nobody should be laughed at or called a liar or being told it was their fault for being a victim. Such instances should be treated as what they were, an assault.

Conclusion

The "Me Too" movement is bringing light to the mistreatment of women in the music industry, and the rape culture that has been created. The entertainment industry has allowed for aggression and lack of consent to be portrayed as romantic. With movies and television shows that show men forcefully kissing women without consent to kiss them, the target demographic of teenagers and young adults are taught that those actions are acceptable. Music lyrics and videos portray women as sexual objects. Describing and showing large bottoms, hourglass figures, skimpy clothing, and sexual dancing through lyrics and videos have put a target on women's backs, making men and other women see them as sexual beings, which, in turn, has degraded women for just being themselves. With the aggressiveness and sexualization of women, many have begun to use their social media platforms to find their voice. The "Me Too" movement is allowing women, such as Beyoncé and other high profile entertainers, to fight for their rights of their own sexualization, something the entertainment industry took away from them decades ago.

As more people stand behind these women, and more people come forward with their stories, the less the industry can do to say it is not happening. Whether you have been a victim of sexual assault or not, or if you believe every woman saying "Me Too," there comes a time when enough is enough, and one must say "I'll fight with you. I stand by 'Me Too'."

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