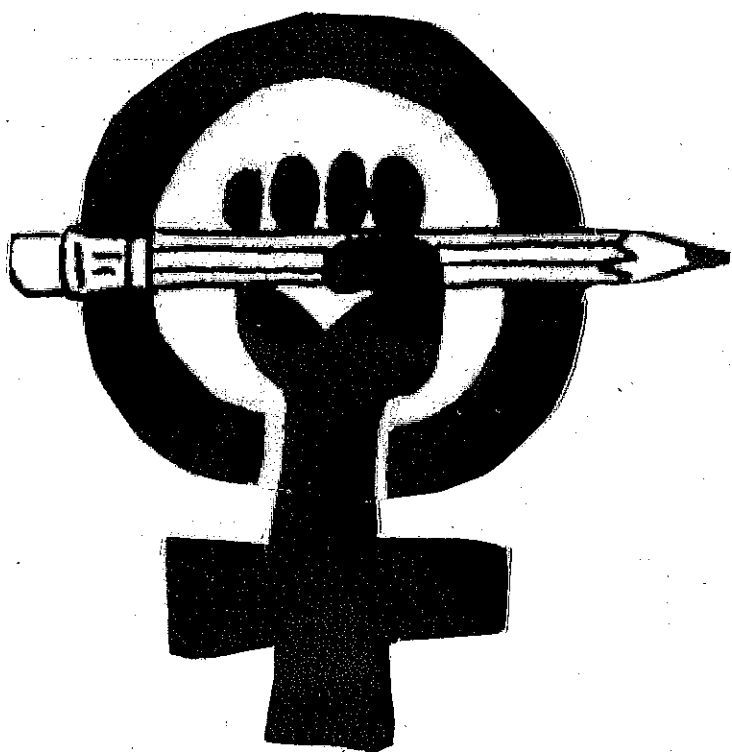
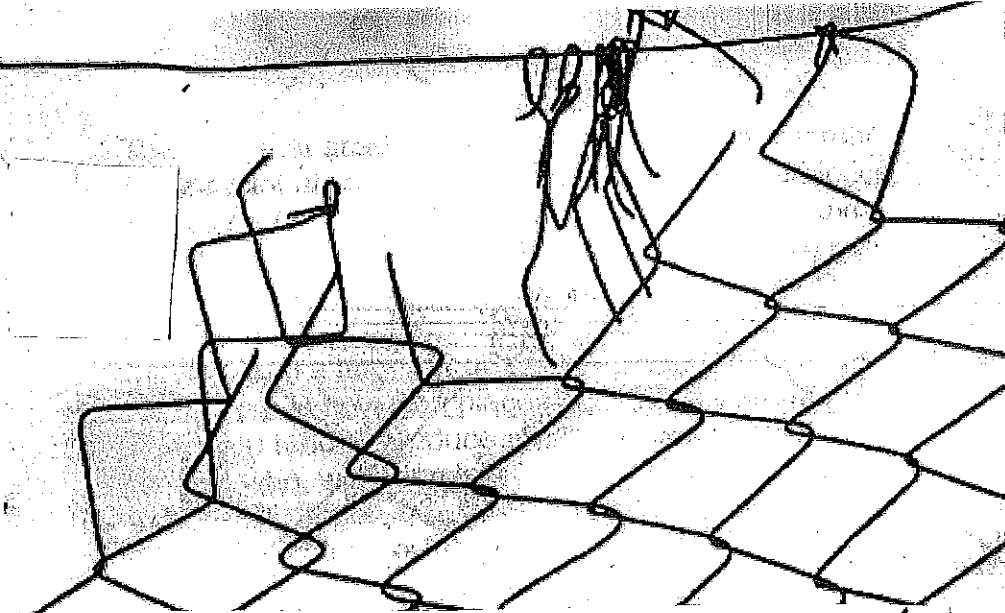


GENDERED HARASSMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

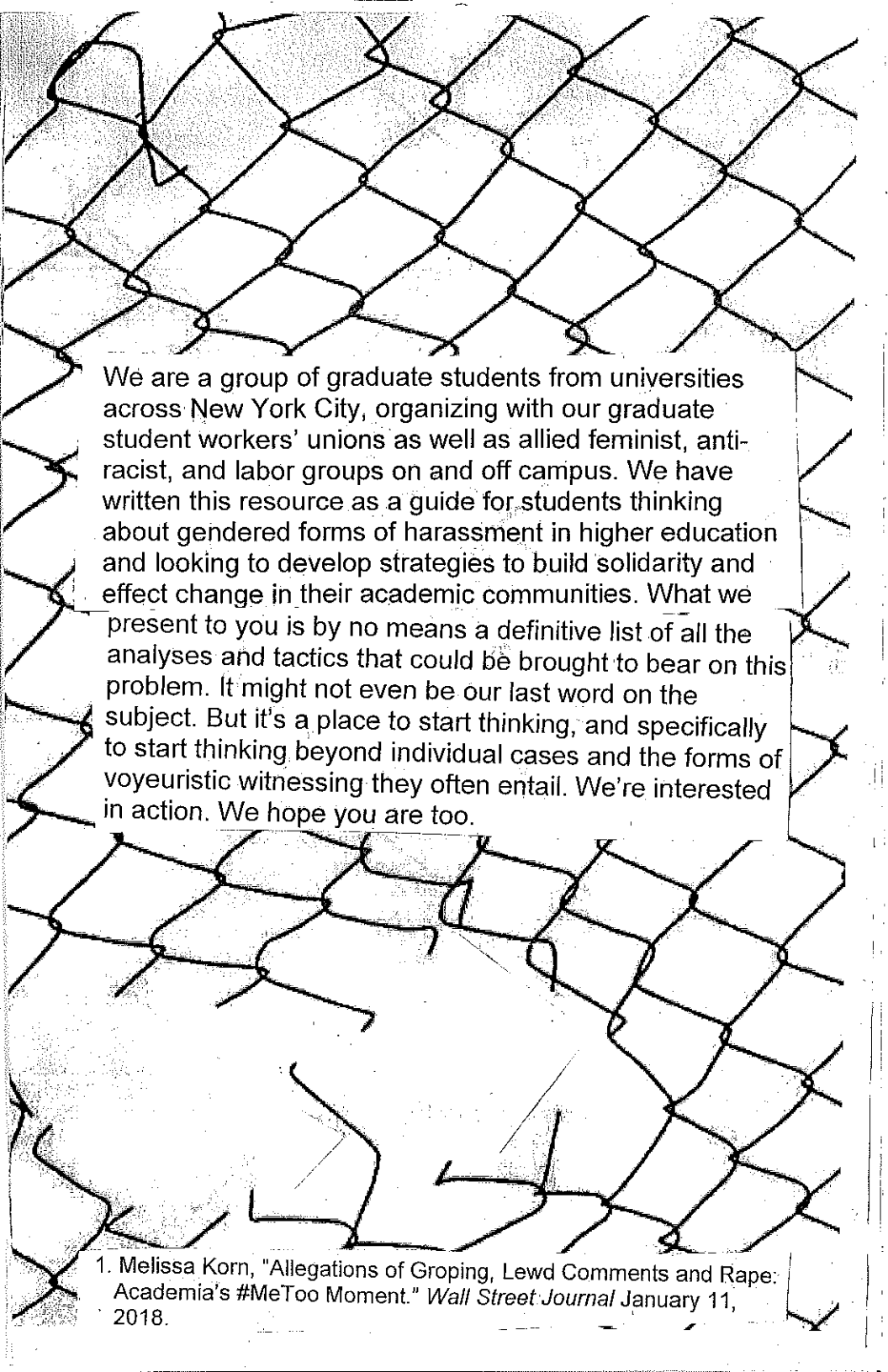




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They say that academia is having its #MeToo moment. So are a lot of sectors: Hollywood, hospitality, athletics, and so on. Listening to the range of testimonials and scandals that have been in the news lately, we've noticed that these stories actually have a lot in common. These are all industries where reputations, discretionary funding, and a large group of aspirational workers are key factors in how workplaces and careers are managed. They also tend to produce similar groups of power brokers who, without a lot of oversight, can make or break your career—maybe for their own interests, or maybe out of their own biases.

It's not surprising that these environments foster all forms of harassment, ranging from outright sexual assault to ongoing microaggressions. There may be bad actors in every system, but some systems allow them to thrive more than others. And, when the division in opportunity and authority falls along strongly gendered and racialized lines—as it still does with tenure—then individual actions aren't just symptomatic of individual morals but instead suggest that harassment is a collective and institutional problem. This means that there are collective and institutional solutions too.



We are a group of graduate students from universities across New York City, organizing with our graduate student workers' unions as well as allied feminist, anti-racist, and labor groups on and off campus. We have written this resource as a guide for students thinking about gendered forms of harassment in higher education and looking to develop strategies to build solidarity and effect change in their academic communities. What we present to you is by no means a definitive list of all the analyses and tactics that could be brought to bear on this problem. It might not even be our last word on the subject. But it's a place to start thinking, and specifically to start thinking beyond individual cases and the forms of voyeuristic witnessing they often entail. We're interested in action. We hope you are too.

1. Melissa Korn, "Allegations of Groping, Lewd Comments and Rape: Academia's #MeToo Moment." *Wall Street Journal* January 11, 2018.

A CASE STUDY IN COLLECTIVE ACTION: CALLING OUT AND BOYCOTTING GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN

In 2017, a group of students and alumni began organizing against a professor at UC Santa Cruz for being a sexual assaulter. His name is Gopal Balakrishnan and he is a Professor in the History of Consciousness Program, in addition to being on the Editorial Board of the New Left Review. He is in a position of power in the academy and the leftist publishing sphere. For years, Gopal Balakrishnan has been a known perpetrator of sexual violence amongst leftist communities in Santa Cruz and beyond. It was an open secret that he partied with his students, and acted inappropriately towards his undergraduate and graduate students. Women in this circle, enduring his advances, were put in a particularly difficult position, forced to feel that coming forward about Balakrishnan's actions would be a betrayal to the leftist community and would potentially jeopardize their own prospects in the university and wider leftist publishing world.

This network of influence and power perpetuates patriarchy and supports harassers in the university and beyond. Balakrishnan has power in helping folks find jobs in publishing, and succeeding in academia. To get a letter of recommendation from Balakrishnan you must at the very least be uncritical of the ways he treats women and non-binary folks. Most in his circle, however, are not merely uncritical of Balakrishnan, but actually partake in the same sorts of sexist behaviors of intimidation, harassment and assault. In this culture, men in positions of power, who are unaccountable for their actions to

#MeToo

women and gender non-binary folks, are nevertheless still seen as academically and politically credible. For women, and gender non-binary folks at UC Santa Cruz, this has meant choosing between our own safety and having access to learning spaces and academic advancement; this has meant watching male peers thrive in these spaces because they don't have the additional burdens we face in their academic and political spheres.

The organizing movement against Balakrishnan has taken on many forms and tactics, including women and non-binary folks filing Title IX claims against him, reaching out for faculty support and making a public statement outside of the university. So far none of these have been completely successful, as Balakrishnan remains a professor at UC Santa Cruz. The movement, however, is ongoing.

While it is worth filing a Title IX claim, movements against sexual assault and harassment in higher education should not necessarily have high hopes for this avenue. At UC Santa Cruz, despite multiple claims filed, the Title IX office did not open an investigation. They continued to tell students calling in that the accounts were not drastic enough, making it seem that they would only respond to a claim about an act of rape, or extreme assault, and not pervasive harassment or sexist behaviors. Using Title IX as a strategy can also be difficult, because not everyone is willing to go through the experience of the investigation, which would include having to recount your traumatic experience(s) and reveal to your assaulter that you are "to blame" for this investigation, thereby making you susceptible to retaliation and potential loss of respect in academic networks. The response speed and efficacy of Title IX offices definitely can vary school to school, but ours is not the only case in which Title IX has failed students seeking support against sexual harassment and assault.

Accordingly, we developed other strategies. Students reached out to faculty for support through a letter notifying them of Balakrishnan's behaviors and the desire to see action taken to create a safe learning environment for women and gender non-conforming students. Unfortunately, this letter was met with lack of support and even harsh criticism from a fair amount of faculty members. This revealed to us the sexist culture of academia in which professors, all in positions of great power, protect each other from accountability.

After it was clear that the school was not going to take action, a group of people decided to follow suit with the #MeToo movement and make a public statement.² Seven statements were written which all recount unacceptable behaviors by Balakrishnan ranging from sexual harassment to assault. The goal of this statement was not merely to pressure the university to act but to create an informal academic and political boycott of Gopal Balakrishnan. It states:

We are not addressing this statement specifically to the university, nor are we hoping to influence university legal proceedings (though of course we wholeheartedly support student efforts to use those avenues). We are addressing a broader "we"—the community of intellectuals, academics, radicals, and current and former students of which GB is and has been a part. We believe that healthy communities need to defend the safety and autonomy of their members and be proactive about abuses of power taking place in their midst. This includes setting clear standards for what kinds of behavior we will tolerate. Misogyny, sexual harassment, and sexual assault should have no place among us.

Over 160 people have signed this statement, which reads:

Those of us signing this statement affirm our support for the people who have shared their personal experiences. While we won't make false claims about our ability to provide "safe space," we want to make it perfectly clear whose presence we value in our spaces. GB and anyone actively supporting him should not expect to be welcome at any events or gatherings where we are present. This is a step toward creating a community that expects and demands that we treat each other with respect and that acknowledges and challenges unequal power dynamics, including those created by gender, race, age, class, and institutional authority.

This document has been powerful and important to the movement for multiple reasons. One, it brings this issue to the public's eye. Two, since the document has contact information, it creates an avenue for more folks to come forward and share experiences, especially those who had been in spaces with Balakrishnan during times in which there was not a movement against him. Lastly, it puts pressure on the university, and those in positions of power in this situation to act.



#MeToo



Other Tactics that Folks Have Used to Call Out Their Harasser and Challenge Campus Culture:

- Join your union. During contract campaigns, advocate for stringent anti-harassment clauses. After the contract's won, advocate for strict enforcement and peer education about the anti-harassment clause.

- Contribute to and build whisper networks. Meet with outgoing students. Meet with incoming students. Ensure that knowledge gets around and stays around.

- Cover your harasser's office door in post-it notes, posters, signs, or paper that identifies your harasser as such. When the office opens, they--and all their peers--will know you know.

- Using the email lists of a cross-campus group like your workers' union, conduct an anonymous survey of your peers. (Googleforms is a quick way to get this up and running but have a plan for how you'll securely store the results and with whom you want to share it beforehand). Consider summarizing and publishing the results in the student press.

- If your school/department don't have a faculty code of conduct, or if it falls short, get a group of peers together and write your own. Ask progressive faculty to bring the matter up for a vote in the next faculty meeting.

- Advocate for progressive policies that make students less dependent on the grace of particular faculty members. These include: paid parental leave, guaranteed funding, a clear policy for allocating teaching and research assignments, the ability to change advisors without financial repercussions.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

In a 2016 study released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), an average of approximately 21% of undergraduate women across the nine schools participating in the study reported experiencing sexual assault since entering college. Non-heterosexual college females reported significantly higher rates than their heterosexual female peers. The majority of rape and sexual assault victims reported being victimized by someone they knew.

The 2016 BJS study also found that in the 2014-2015 academic year, an average of 6.4% of college women across the nine participating schools reported being victims of intimate partner violence. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 50% of women report experiencing their first incident of intimate partner violence between 18 and 24 years of age. Being a victim of sexual assault, especially rape, can negatively impact a student's mental and physical health and academic outcomes. Being a victim of dating violence and intimate partner violence is related to a host of detrimental health and social functioning outcomes, such as academic failure, depression or anxiety, and alcohol and drug abuse.

In a campus environment, students who are victimized by other students face unique challenges, such as close proximity to perpetrators and difficulty maintaining anonymity. The majority of rape incidents of college students are unreported by victims—in the 2016 BJS study, only 7% reported the incident to a school official.

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault#sexualviolence>

Title IX: Know Your Rights & Know Their Shortcomings

In American universities all students are covered by broad anti-discrimination laws that apply to any educational institution that receives federal funding. This includes sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination and violence that stems from your gender. Once an institution becomes aware of such issues (typically via the filing of a formal complaint), they are required to conduct an investigation and take actions to protect their students and workers from future harm or retaliation.

You don't need to be a citizen to file a Title IX complaint, nor do you need to be the victim of harassment yourself. Filing a complaint doesn't prevent you or others from also pursuing independent legal action, nor does it obligate you to interface with the criminal justice system in any way.

At its best, Title IX is a way to remove abusers from positions of power and influence, and to force institutions to make preventative and retroactive accommodations to the people who experience discrimination or harassment. It can get your harasser fired or expelled, fix your schedule so you don't have to see them again, and adjust your time-to-degree requirements for any leave you may need to take.

At its worst, however, the Title IX process can retraumatize its complainants or simply and frustratingly come to nothing. The process of investigating a Title IX complaint can be long, involving multiple interviews, hearings, and comment periods in which your harasser may also be present. Depending on your Title IX coordinator and school administrators, penalties may be minimal or temporary. In some cases, they may downplay your account or sit on a report if it will be damaging to institutional reputations or personal friends.³ Moreover, although there is not supposed to be any retaliation for filing a Title IX complaint, collegial relations and academic opportunities may suffer in the process and cannot simply be ordered back into place when the process is over.

What's more, the reach of Title IX law is currently under attack by the Trump administration and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. They have already stopped prosecuting cases of trans students & bathroom access and have significantly raised the burden of proof complainants must meet under federal standards for sexual assault claims. They have further lessened institutions' legal responsibility to take proactive steps to prevent harassment and assault in the first place.

Title IX is still a tool available in cases of harassment and assault, but it may not be the best or only option to consider. It tends to be reactive and ad hoc in the face of individual cases, and it does not in itself drive policy shifts or structural changes that could change the power structures of academia that make harassment so frequent and difficult to respond to in the first place.

3. Fangzhou Liu, "Retired English professor accused of sexual assault by former graduate student," *Stanford Daily*. September 9, 2017.

6 Things to Navigate in Our Institutionalized Rape Culture Where It's Hard to Claim "Me Too"

When I finally tell someone about my experience with sexual violence, I feel the need to qualify it with "the story." Rather than simply claiming that experience, I have to preface it with an explanation. The first time I told my partner about my experience, he later observed, "You didn't once use the word rape." I still have a hard time saying, "I was raped" or "I was assaulted" without explaining. I continue to resist my own experience. Sometimes I hear stories that are very similar to mine, yet the person doesn't name it as rape. I don't want to label their experience, yet I also read that experience as traumatic, violent, and unjust. And then I also wonder, is this friend like me? Struggling with how to name their experience but wishing that it were validated and understood?

Processing one's own experience with sexual violence can be difficult. If you're like me, and you too are struggling, I want to validate that. For so long, I've wanted more people to come out with similar stories like mine, but being too afraid to myself. I have had friends tell me that this happens to everyone. Everyone has an experience like this. And that horrifies me. Because this shouldn't happen to anyone, much less everyone. All stories matter, and telling our stories challenges our own isolation. However, we may not always need to hear someone's story or tell our own just to validate our experiences with sexual and gendered violence.

Here are six difficult things that we might navigate in the process of claiming #MeToo around sexual violence:

1. Disconnection from the Experience

People respond and cope with trauma in multiple ways. For me, I separate the experience from myself. It's something that happened to me, but not part of me. While I experience everyday triggers, I mostly feel emotionally flat about my experience. By insulating myself, I pushed forward afterwards with as little external disruption as possible. Yet, somehow this also felt disingenuous to my feminist identity and to my social justice work.

In this current #MeToo moment, I've been thinking a lot about: Am I betraying other survivors by not coming out with my story more often? Why am I still disassociated from "claiming" my own experiences around gendered and sexual violence? It takes time to negotiate my strategy for survival with participating in a larger strategy for change. Beyond self-reflection, some helpful ways to negotiate this process are building a collective system of support. This could happen more through transformative justice work in our organizing circles and also addressing gendered harassment as an institutional problem.

2. Internalized Myths from Rape Culture

I initially told myself things like "What happened wasn't that bad! You're fine." It's like a toxic voice inside of me echoing external skepticism. It's not that I'm victim-blaming myself or don't understand my experience. I also know that most people know their offender, unlike what's depicted in the news or on TV. Most sexual acts of violence are not caused by strangers in dark alleyways or masked assailants breaking into homes. However, the Law & Order: SVU sensationalized rape narrative has insidiously crept its way into my subconscious and created a false archetype about rape, trauma, and violence.

* * * *

Some experiences end up feeling low on the imaginary hierarchy in terms of what evokes empathy. But listen: Your experience matters. Seek affirming spaces that support you and your experience. If possible, begin to build a close network of friends and allies that you trust — because undoing rape culture is a collective process. If there isn't anyone close to you that you feel comfortable doing this with, consider looking for a counselor or therapist that is equipped to discuss sexual assault issues and can support your needs. NYU offers students 10 counseling sessions during a semester and then offers referrals after (this is also why we need to fight for better healthcare!).

3. Fear of Invalidation

The survivor stories that are uplifted are most often "perfect victim" narratives. While these stories are deeply empathetic, painful, and worth listening to, society has normalized sexual assault in a way that perfect victim narratives and perceived extreme cases have become the only ones that seem important. Activists have used the perfect victim narrative to move issues around sexual assault forward, but that's also silenced many other stories.

Social and cultural norms have created false ideas around who deserves compassion. Through collectively contesting issues of gendered violence and harassment in our everyday places of work and life, we can also begin to engage the plurality of experiences.

4. Struggle to Undo the 'Real Rape' Myth

Recently, the controversy around Aziz Ansari has brought up discussions around "gray areas" and legitimate claims to sexual violence. The myth of "real rape" is so deeply embedded in our cultural context. For so long, I was unwilling to admit my experience of assault to myself even after I shared it with others. The toxic voice in my head whispers things, "Move on. Stop making a big deal." If a friend talks to me about sexual assault, I don't place them under the same scrutiny that I place myself. We don't have a culturally accepted comprehensive definition of sexual assault and violence yet. As Jessica Valenti points out, "The reason we have qualifiers — legitimate, forcible, date, gray — is because at the end of the day it's not enough to say 'rape.'"

5. Dealing with Assault in Your Social (and Professional) Circle

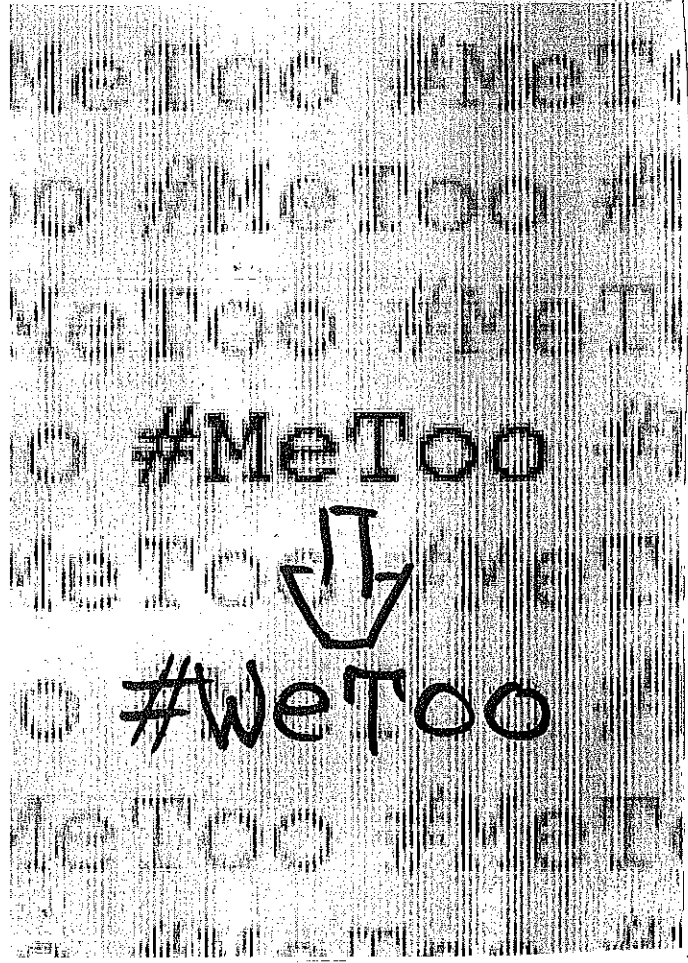
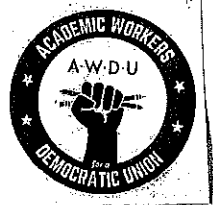
When most sexual assault happens within a social circle, and if someone doesn't want to take the long, arduous journey through the criminal justice system, how do we begin to make reparations and hold each other accountable?

(I wonder if the person who assaulted me even knows). The nice guy myth is so intertwined with modern rape culture. In the same vein that people are so afraid of being called racist, sexist, homophobic, there's a lot of resistance to being labeled a rapist. But what happens when someone speaks up to say that what happened isn't okay? While I've stepped away from the social circle related to my experience, that isn't necessarily a possibility for some and a temporary solution at best. We need to come up with strategies to collectively hold each other accountable.

Even though I've started acknowledging this experience, talking about it with people in that social circle still is an obstacle. I don't want to be perceived as causing unnecessary drama. Yet, the more time that has passed that I haven't spoken up, I keep letting him get away with it and maybe keep repeating these same acts of violence against other women. The overall ignorance around the institutional and cultural normalization of rape culture makes it difficult for people in that social circle to acknowledge or recognize his behavior as violent.

6. Lack of Institutional, Societal, and Cultural Support

The burden is often on the victim to educate in a society where the systems of support, affirmation, and validation aren't firmly in place. People who experience sexual violence are stripped of their voices. We live in a society where media institutions, politicians, and courts blame victims and diminish their experience, where only 3% of rapists will spend even one day in prison, and where rape is a part of pop culture. This is a society that questions credibility and disbelieves stories of trauma. It's frustrating that even sexual assault legalese labels victims as "complainants" and perpetrators as "respondents." The lack of support makes the coming out process of navigating assault exhausting and isolating.



STOP

**GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE
AT WORK!**