

Drew Lovett
#MeToo 1 year later

It was clear nearly one year ago that #MeToo was no common trending topic that would fade into the memes, vines or something President said on of his Twitter rants.

These two powerful words were unavoidable to all as the hashtag was tweeted by celebrities, family members, friends, co-workers and strangers who courageously shared their stories in both a unifying and healing social media movement.

When The New York Time's published the article last October detailing Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein's sexual misconducts, actress Alyssa Milano encouraged the spreading of the hashtag as a show of support and admission that quickly went viral.

In this last year, news broadcasts and Twitter served up daily reminders of #MeToo, as powerful men in entertainment, media and politics were unmasked due to their sexual misconducts.

"It's Bullshit!" SU women & gender studies Professor Rebecca Ward exclaimed from her swivel chair in Horton Hall. She was referring to the old excuse of "boys will be boys" as Senate Judiciary Chairman Charles Grassley talked live on CNN from her computer about the highly debated testimony of both Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford and Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

"How do we respect women in our society? The truth is we don't," Professor Ward said, "We got the vote in 1920 but it was the result of hard protesting, in the '60s we spoke up about reproductive rights and now I hear things like this [Kavanaugh hearings] and I wonder if we're going backwards."

In Ward's classroom, she teaches students that the best way to be an activist for any cause is through individual advocacy. She believes one can make an impact by making connections and listening respectfully to differing opinions in the new age women's movement.

"This is not about bashing men at all," Ward said, "I am a mother of sons and I happen to really like men." She explained that this viral hashtag turned nationwide conversation has to bring about systematic change and not just he-said-she-said debates.

Ward believes that there are certain times in history people do need to speak up especially for those who feel they have never had a voice whether that is done in a public sphere or one-on-one.

"I see hope in my students and I believe in the power and intellect of the next generation," Ward said "I saw it happen with gay marriage and I know I'll see it with true women's rights."

While the #MeToo movement has encouraged conversation from people's smartphones to their dining room tables, critics fear the movement takes away from deeper issues that lie within gender equality: race.

"The grassroots movement was for those without a voice and to me it has developed into an elitist movement," said Diane Jefferson, SU Director of Multicultural Student Affairs. "... it's for women who are 'OK' or have the status."

Jefferson explained how even the originator of “Me Too,” Tarana Burke an activist from Bronx, New York was disconnected from the cause until actress Alyssa Milano acknowledged her only months after the social media buzz.

“People love the word intersectionality, but in this moment I don’t believe it’s been taken into consideration for not only black women, but also poor women,” Jefferson said.

Kapri Brown, assistant to Jefferson said how women of color have dealt with stereotypes and historical objectifications that should also be included in the dialogue within the #MeToo conversation.

Brown explained how sexual violence has been a recurring theme in America’s past since the days of colonialism when enslaved women were forced into daily sexual abuse and subjected to invasive vaginal experiments by medical professionals.

Brown explained that in the modern day, this systematic oppression can be seen with the Department of Justice finding that the Baltimore police department forced strip searches on African-American women.

“If that were somebody that was not of color, would that have happened the same way? Probably not.” Brown said while Jefferson quipped, “#MeToo turns into #NotYou.”

Jefferson believes the only way to be heard is for all women to truly unify. “Across the board all things are not equitable with women,” Jefferson said. “It’s those who dare to speak up in spite of covert oppression.”

She explained how important it is to not act like issues like #MeToo and the many layers that make up the movement aren’t happening, but to acknowledge them and have conversations even if it is uncomfortable.

“As educated women we have an obligation to speak to and speak up for our sisters! We dare to talk about this.”

Stephanie Erdice, SU Director of the Women’s Center talked about how SU has kept students safe one year after her niche became the topic of national conversation.

Erdice explained that the impact of #MeToo was prevalent among those who only had a surface level understanding of sexual assault.

“We should have an open dialogue where people are allowed to ask questions” Erdice said, “understanding that everyone has a different experience will broaden the conversation.”

She explained that the country is struggling with respecting women but it’s not something that is new to America. Erdice also explained that there are many other marginalized groups that need to be heard clearly in this country.

“It’s been like this for centuries,” Erdice said. “It’s even more difficult for gender queer people, LGBT community and men who have been sexually abused, it is even more crushing for these folks.”

The SU Women’s Center has provided “Brave spaces” for those who seek support or want to go through the process of code of conduct that they are committed to keeping the campus a safe and comfortable environment for all people.