

Marching Forward

By Zoe Bonfield

January 21st, 2017. A day that will go down in history. Not for the presidential inauguration that occurred, but rather for the almost 1,000 marches that connected women, men, and children from around the world. Approximately five million individuals, from Alaska to Zimbabwe, from cancer wards to retirement communities, all united in our pink, knit hats, marched as one, ready to take on whatever the upcoming four years would hold (Chenoweth and Pressman, 2017).

Little did we know on that day in 2017, that the following year would be full of more and more women beginning to feel empowered and to speak their truths publicly. An era of discrimination and assault was no longer going to be tolerated, and an era of change and power was upon us.

In October of that year, the Me Too movement spread like wildfire, practically overnight. Suddenly, thousands of women around the world began sharing their stories of sexual assault or harassment that they had experienced in their lives through social media. Some shared their full stories along with the hashtag, #metoo. Others simply wrote “Me too,” and no further explanation was needed. The sheer number of women who participated in this movement was astounding. Everyone knew at least one woman who had been affected by this awful epidemic, and people started to grasp the true volume of the issue.

A few months later, in January of 2018, a group of Hollywood celebrities shined light on the Times Up movement, fighting against sexual assault by powerful men in the entertainment industry. Women in Hollywood were sharing their stories of being exploited and abused by men in power in Hollywood. Through this movement, most celebrities who attended the Grammys wore black in honor of the women who had faced this type of assault and explained that the time of powerful men not being held accountable for their actions was over, and this behavior would no longer be tolerated.

These movements are powerful and moving, but there are a few consequences rising. Many people, mostly older generations that tend to lean more toward the right on the political spectrum, are now fighting back, questioning what actually counts as sexual assault. “Does a simple compliment from a man at work about a woman looking nice that day count as harassment?” some ask. “A man can’t touch me on the shoulder without people getting upset over assault,” others claim.

These questions, along with others, that are being posed on social media are quite hurtful to the cause. Women are finally feeling empowered and brave enough to speak their truth, get involved, and stand up for themselves against men who have oppressed and abused them. Why must women tear each other down and devalue each other as well? When women don’t support other women in this difficult process of coming forward and discussing sexual assault or harassment, no man ever will.

As women in our society facing many forms of sexual harassment and assault, we need to band together, as we did on that day in January of 2017, and support each other in our efforts to end this awful cycle. Our truths and experiences will never be taken seriously by the perpetrators of these atrocities until our survivors stand together and honor each and every one of our lived experiences for how we interpret them in our own lives.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/07/this-is-what-we-learned-by-counting-the-womens-marches/?utm_term=.5d6984b46208