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#MeToo in Japan and South Korea: #WeToo, #WithYou

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ABSTRACT

This article compares the impact of the #MeToo movement in South Korea and Japan. In South Korea, #MeToo inspired many women to go public with their accusations in numerous high-profile cases. Those accusations inspired the mobilization of mass demonstrations and demands for legal reform. In South Korea, the movement's impact is evident in policy proposals and the revision of laws on sexual harassment and gender-based violence. In Japan, however, the movement has grown more slowly. Fewer women went public, and if they did, many remained anonymous. The movement remains limited to a small number of cases that resulted in the formation of a professional network to support women journalists. We argue that the different outcomes in these countries can be explained by the strength of women's engagement in civil society and the nature of the media coverage in each case. In both countries, however, women continue to face a powerful backlash that includes victim-blaming and social and professional sanctions for speaking up.

KEYWORDS

Japan; South Korea; #MeToo; #WeToo; #WithYou; gender; sexual harassment; activism

Introduction

In a packed auditorium in Philadelphia, PA, on August 14, 2018,¹ Tarana Burke, the founder of the Me Too movement, shared the meaning of “Me, too.” Burke was working in a community center helping survivors of sexual violence and speaking with a young girl in middle school who began to open up about her experience. At that moment, Burke said that she wanted so much to say the words “me, too” to the child, but that they were “stuck in her throat.” The gravity of that moment as she received this child's truth, paralyzed her as she had to come to terms with her own trauma again. This exchange highlights how difficult it is to speak about these deeply personal and private matters and show support to another survivor. It is this moment that changed everything for Tarana Burke.

Burke said that this was when she realized how much women and girls need a space in which they can share what happened to them. To speak “me,

too” can be an act of courage, empowerment, and solidarity for victims who have kept such memories and experiences to themselves out of shame and fear. Burke dedicated herself to helping women and girls from her own community, Black women and girls from underprivileged neighborhoods, but her words of solidarity began a movement to break the silence that keeps these private experiences and struggles hidden. When Hollywood actress and activist, Alyssa Milano,² shared a tweet asking others who had experienced sexual assault or harassment to post “#MeToo” to show the degree of harassment and assault in the film industry and beyond, there was the fear that Burke’s many years of service to her community and advocacy on these issues offline, could and would be overshadowed by white women celebrities like Milano online.

Therefore, in this special issue and in our essay, we want to honor Tarana Burke and assure that she is never forgotten for what she did before a hashtag was placed in front of her phrase, “Me, too.” #MeToo is not just Hollywood celebrities and elite white women, but all of us and in any occupation, age group, or country because, sadly, it is what seems to unify women across political ideologies, religion, and place. This is why we also go beyond the United States to show how the movement impacted women in other countries. “#MeToo” brought women together across the United States, but did it have the same effect in other places?

In a comparative analysis of the influence of #MeToo in Japan and South Korea, we analyze how #MeToo galvanized women’s activism against sexual violence in each country and if any policy outcomes were generated by the movement in this early stage. Japan and Korea share many similarities regarding women’s political and economic status. Both countries do not fare well with respect to the gender wage gap, women’s leadership, and labor market participation in Global Gender Gap Indices.³

However, we find that #MeToo has a greater impact in South Korea. It has a vibrant bottom-up grassroots movement resulting in concrete legislative proposals and partial legal reform. When #MeToo emerged in late 2017, it quickly gained momentum as women came forward with public allegations, and protest rallies were mobilized by women activists. There have also been more high-profile cases of harassment in the media to help open up a greater space for #MeToo. However, #MeToo developed more slowly in Japan and remains mostly contained in the field of journalism. Women in Japan prefer to remain anonymous due to the risk of victim-blaming and the lack of a support system for victims of sexual violence and harassment. There were few organized street protests, although women professionals demanded strongly for legal reform.⁴ We argue that the nature of media coverage and the strength of women’s engagement in civil society in each case resulted in these different responses in South Korea and Japan.

South Korea

#MeToo inspired Korean women to speak out about sexual harassment and to call for social change. In 2018, hundreds of women of all occupations and ages came forward with accusations of sexual harassment. However, a women's movement like #MeToo is not new in South Korea. The fore-runners of the #MeToo movement were the former comfort women in the 1990s.⁵ Hundreds of women who had been forced to serve as sexual slaves for the Japanese imperial army during World War II came forward in Korea and other Asian countries after a half century's silence.⁶ The testimonies of #MeToo demonstrate that the patriarchal and social and cultural structures that had kept victims silent have not changed much even today. For instance, sexual harassment is not viewed as a crime against women's human rights; strong gender norms and the patriarchal culture make women internalize sexual harassment as the cost for being in the workplace; the vulnerability of women in lower and more precarious positions of employment makes it hard for victims to speak out.

The issue of sexual violence has always been central in the feminist movement in South Korea, but it was during the Park Geun-Hye government (2013.2-2017.3) that a younger generation of women became sensitized to prevalent misogyny and hidden camera issues in internet communities (Kim 2018). Grassroots activists were formed to call for the government's action to tackle the hidden camera issue in which hidden cameras in bathrooms, changing rooms, and other private spaces were used to record or take photos of women unknowingly and then posted online. This kind of porn—taken without consent or even the knowledge of the victim—was shared for financial gain, and the government has not done enough to regulate the sale of these cameras or to prosecute perpetrators. Because of these issues, Korean women organized many protests against online sexual abuse and femicide in the last several years leading up to the #MeToo movement. Many of them also joined the impressive protests mobilized to impeach the former President Park Geun-Hye, which is called the *Candlelight Revolution*. In South Korea, therefore, women were already galvanized by various political movements within civil society; this elevated awareness made it possible for #MeToo to take off in a way that it could not in Japan.

Against this backdrop, #MeToo in South Korea was ignited by a woman prosecutor, Suh Ji-Hyeon, on January 29, 2018, who went public with her experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination on a live news program. Three days before her coming forward, she wrote a story about her experience on the internal web of the prosecutor's office. She said that she was sexually harassed eight years ago by a senior prosecutor. When she reported the case to her immediate superior, he did not take it seriously. Instead, they scrutinized her career and background and gave her a poor performance

evaluation. She was then relocated to a less-prominent position. Instead of protecting the victim and proceeding to resolve the victim's grievances, the institution punished her for filing a claim against a powerful male authority. Suh wrote that "it took 8 years for me to understand that it was not my fault...I was deeply touched by a movement that a Black woman started in a small town in the US ten years ago. It gave me the courage to speak up...."⁷ Suh concluded her posting with #MeToo. This was a very public and high-profile case because she herself was a prosecutor, which is an occupation that only a small number of elite women can aspire to in South Korea.

On a live JTBC TV news show, she said she decided to speak publicly to prove her story and to send a message to victims that "it was not your fault." It was a shocking but powerful message that was a call for solidarity with victims who remained silent. Suh's message inspired many women to share their own experiences. Professional women, including university professors and legislators, shared their memories of sexual harassment and made formal announcements calling for fundamental changes in the patriarchal culture of South Korea's male-centered organizations and workplaces. Many powerful men, such as movie directors, actors, high school teachers, literary figures, and university professors, were accused of sexual harassment or sexual assault. The #MeToo movement emboldened women in all occupations and regions to speak up, anonymously and publicly. It showed how widespread sexual violence against women and minorities is in Korean society. In the South Korean case, women came out publicly, and that media attention inspired others to come forward.

This was followed by another influential case of sexual violence involving a high-profile politician. On March 5, 2018, Governor of Chungbuk province, An Hee-Jeong, was accused of sexual misconduct and sexual assault against a staffer, Kim Ji-Eun. Kim also appeared live on a JTBC news show about her experiences.

Kim's testimony was heartbreaking. Because of her respect for him and the power and authority he exerted over his staffers in the hierarchical working environment of a political campaign, she endured his sexual misconduct for months. She was told repeatedly that her duty was to protect his political career and reputation. She said that An behaved like a "king" whom employees like her could not dare to defy. This work environment made it extremely hard for her to resist An's demands for sexual relations. But Kim finally decided to speak out when she realized that he would never change his behavior nor feel any guilt for what he had done to many of his female employees. The next day of the public testimony, she filed a criminal case with the police against Governor An for sexual assault and harassment. An resigned and his party expelled him. In the first half of 2018, the JTBC had a live broadcast of five victims of sexual harassment in several high-profile cases. Their courage broke

the culture of silence on this taboo subject and left an indelible impact on Korean society.

In order to show solidarity with those courageous victims, many hashtag movements, including #WithYou, spread. At the same time, these developments prompted women activists to tackle the problem collectively. On March 15, 2018, women's groups formed a network called "Citizen's Action to Support the MeToo Movement." Its mission is to support victims, to raise public consciousness, to push for reforms to prevent sexual harassment, and to seek justice. The organization's manifesto starts with the sentence that "the time of sexual discrimination and sexual violence has ended. A gender equal democracy will complete the *Candlelight Revolution*" (Citizen's Action to Support MeToo Movement 2018). It clearly states that sexual harassment and sexual assault are not an individual's problem but a problem of structural gender inequality. It declares that the #MeToo movement demands a fundamental reform of the structural inequality in society and rape culture.

Citizen's Action sees the #MeToo movement as an extension of the *Candlelight Revolution* that had led to the impeachment of former president Park Geun-Hye. Women participated in a six-month long street protest to demand that Park step down, contributing to the change of government. The patriarchal culture has not changed, however, and the daily life of women remains just as difficult as it was before. It was not "democracy come true" for women. The #MeToo movement brought to light this structural problem of gender inequality in Korean society.

Their first public event had women speak for 2018 minutes straight (because it was the year 2018) for two consecutive days on March 22 and 23 at Chong-gye Park in central Seoul. Many women came on the stage and shared their stories of sexual abuse and violence with other women, listened, and supported one another. For those women unable to or not ready to speak on stage, a wall was designated for written notes and messages about their experiences.

The event was followed by a "protest to end sexual discrimination and sexual violence." Since then, six street protests were organized in Seoul to create more awareness about sexual violence in Korean society. The second was held on April 7; the third on April 21; the fourth on May 17; the fifth on August 18; and the sixth on December 1. The protests also spread to regions outside of Seoul and the third protest took place in six different cities simultaneously. The fifth protest took place right after the district court ruled that An Hee-Jeong was not guilty on August 14. More than 20,000 citizens participated in that protest, which was the largest of the six protests in 2018 (Han 2018).

These protests brought about some meaningful changes. The authorities and government were pressured to take action, so special committees were

organized to investigate the prosecutor's office and the National Assembly. The committees conducted research and surveys. One of their studies showed that more than 60% of women in the prosecutor's offices experienced sexual harassment. Many respondents testified that women were looked down upon and their work was undervalued; 85% of women prosecutors replied that they were at a disadvantage for promotion, work evaluation, and the distribution of tasks (Lee 2018).⁸ On the basis of those shocking results, the committee proposed new guidelines and organizational reforms to handle sexual violence claims. 139 bills were proposed to the National Assembly of South Korea. Seven laws have passed by the end of 2018.

Yet there has also been a powerful backlash against victims and these efforts at reform. For example, some perpetrators went to civil court against victims. In particular, the district court's not guilty ruling of the former Governor An, was a major disappointment for activists and victims who spoke out (he was subsequently found guilty in the appellate court on February 1st). Since it was the first #MeToo court ruling, many saw this as evidence of a backlash against the expansion of the #MeToo movement. The court decision demonstrates the power of male elites' homosocial networks and their resistance to change. While many other court cases remain in progress, it is still common for the judge, an elite man himself, to show sympathy for the perpetrator while being suspicious of victims' testimonies.

Japan

The impact of the #MeToo movement in Japan has been quite different because fewer women came forward and many preferred to remain anonymous. As with other countries, #MeToo began in Japan because of social media: the first women to go public used Facebook and Twitter to share their stories. Hachu, a freelance writer and blogger, wrote a Facebook post detailing the harassment she endured while working at Japan's leading advertising agency, Dentsu ("#MeToo, Say Victims of Sexual Harassment in Japan" 2017). Her post identified Yuki Kishi, a celebrated creative director as her harasser. Her Facebook post and another story on BuzzFeed on December 17, 2017, resulted in a public apology from Kishi and his resignation from Dentsu. At this time, other young women inspired by the global movement on social media, came forward on Twitter (Harimaya 2018). A 20-year-old woman, who goes by the name Chino, used the social media platform to accuse a director of a theater group, Mikiya Ichihara, of harassment—harassment that began when she was in high school (Kageyama 2018). Yet as soon as these stories began to be posted on Twitter, the backlash began to put pressure on victims to remain silent and to question their integrity. Chino and others received numerous criticisms and demands for evidence of their accusations online. Speaking out has serious economic costs for

women since this kind of public attention can hurt their employment prospects and professional reputations. It can also result in bullying and trolling online and victim-blaming. Nevertheless, these young women were inspired by what they saw on social media around the world, and because they chose to go public online, they brought the #MeToo movement to Japan.

Then, another young woman, Shiori Ito, a freelance journalist, shared her story and quickly became the face of the #MeToo movement around the world, even though Hachu was the first to go public on social media. Ito's story demonstrates the great professional and social pressures on women to stay silent as she was a freelancer who was not in a long-term permanent work situation. It is not a coincidence that Hachu and Ito were freelancers at the time they went public with their accusations because they were not as constrained as they would have been had they held permanent positions at firms. There would be much greater pressure to remain silent because of the repercussions for speaking out about harassment. Speaking out about harassment can also hurt the reputation of the firm or organization. For women in long-term permanent positions, speaking out can mean the end of their career and irreparable damage to their reputations.

In this section, we look at the #MeToo movement in Japan and show how and why the movement gained very little traction compared to South Korea. Despite laws to assure the rights of women in the workplace, such as the Equal Employment and Opportunity Law of 1985, the Ministry of Labor's official recognition and definition of sexual harassment as a violation in the workplace (Efron 1999) and the government's recent "womenomics" agenda to promote women's greater inclusion in the workforce, Japan has not done enough to address its procedural, legal, and governmental responsibilities in protecting women or any victims of rape or harassment. According to a survey of 1,000 women, more than 60% reported that they experienced sexual harassment at work (see *Nikkei Style* 2018). Another survey of 10,000 female respondents, conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Labor, reported that one-third of women ages 25–44 were harassed at work, but less than 40% took action (see *Nikkei Style* 2018). Furthermore, because sexual harassment is not considered a crime in Japan, it remains a private matter, and crime statistics do not capture the full extent of sexual harassment and abuse, especially of minors (Ogasawara 2011).

It was only last year, in 2017, that the definition of rape was expanded to include anal and oral rape and to include male victims of rape. The rape law had not been amended since 1907. The age of consent is only 13 years of age. Although some local governments have raised that age, the law has not been amended nationwide. Furthermore, because the legal definition of rape is so narrow,⁹ it is very hard to prosecute perpetrators for anything that is outside of that strict definition. Sexual harassment, assault, and rape are on a spectrum, but the law only considers the most violent and aggressive

form of violence at the end of the spectrum: rape with the use of force (Yatagawa and Nakano 2008). Furthermore, because sexual harassment is not criminalized, women feel that they must endure harassment and put up with these behaviors to keep their jobs, so they remain silent.

Japan also has a visible mass culture and “pornographic society” that promote the sexualization of women and girls and erotizes sexual violence. In the past, women activists have taken political action to remove pornographic ads, and there was an effort to promote greater awareness and public discussion of sexual harassment or “sekuhara” (the Japanese shortened their translation of the word *sekushuaru harasumento*) in 1988–89 (Burns 2005, 3). Because criminal justice personnel hold sexist attitudes, and the legal system focuses on restorative justice–healing relations among the offender, victim, and community, the state views sexual harassment and nonconsensual acquaintance rape as a private matter (Burns 2005, 45, 55).

In Japan, women journalists like Hachu and Shiori Ito were the first to speak out (Ito 2018). Their courage and willingness to come forward publicly helped to generate greater awareness about the ways in which the Japanese legal and criminal justice system operate when a woman is raped and attempts to seek justice. In Ito’s suit against Noriyuki Yamaguchi—who was her senior colleague and mentor, a former Washington Bureau Chief for TBS, and a biographer of the Prime Minister—she accused him of raping her after attending what she understood was to be a mentoring dinner. Video evidence supports her claims, but he denies it was rape, and the media coverage of her lawsuit was very critical of her dress and behavior. In addition to the legal barriers that make it so hard for women to pursue cases of sexual harassment and rape, the media attention perpetuated the narrative of sexual harassment and rape as being the victim’s fault or responsibility rather than the perpetrator’s.

Women also participated in the backlash, thus, putting the burden back on women to handle and prevent these issues. The idea that she was somehow responsible and leading him on is a disturbing narrative perpetuated by the media in its coverage of her case, and it dominates and feeds into the backlash in Japan. The nature of the media coverage dampened the #MeToo movement in Japan, whereas it amplified women’s voices and the movement in South Korea—inspiring more women to come forward publicly. Most of the major newspapers and broadcasting companies did not even report Ito’s story because her story was not viewed to have news value (this is common because men are the gatekeepers in the media industry; Kazue and Okano 2018). Because of the global #MeToo movement, however, her story did receive global media attention and brought to light the realities faced by working women and the problems with the legal, medical, and penal process when women do have the courage to report and try to seek justice for sexual violence and assault in Japan.

To promote solidarity and offer a collective voice to help victims speak up a group of Ito's friends and other allies, formed #WeToo in February 2018 to support Ito (Mori and Oda 2018). #MeToo inspired other women journalists to take action as well, but many Japanese women still feel that joining #MeToo is too difficult and costly, even when they feel sympathy for and admire the courage of the women who have already come forward. Instead of sharing their own stories, they want to focus their support for those who already went public. Thus, #WeToo (support for the victims) gained more popularity in Japan (Mori and Oda 2018).

In addition to Ito, there were other high-profile cases of insensitive remarks and harassment by high-level politicians, but in those cases, there was some accountability for those actions because these men were reprimanded or removed from their positions. Since Shiori Ito's case, Tatsuya Yamaguchi, a musician in the band TOKIO, was fired after allegations were made about his behavior, and Junichi Fukuda of the Ministry of Finance resigned and had his retirement payments reduced (Mori and Oda 2018). These high-profile cases received fairly wide media coverage, and one wonders if there would have been as quick a response were it not for the global attention on Shiori Ito's case and the #MeToo movement.

Fukuda's case drew particular public attention. It became public when a woman journalist came out long after Ito went public. On April 12, 2018, the magazine, *Shukan Shincho*, published an interview with a woman reporter for the broadcast network, TV Asahi, about the sexual harassment she endured from a top bureaucrat of the Ministry of Finance (*The Asahi Shimbun* 2018). "The woman is a reporter for broadcast network TV Asahi, which threatened to reprimand her for going public with the conversation without consent from her source. Her story prompted others to come forward, and the rampant sexual harassment toward female reporters in Japan finally began spilling out" (McNeill 2018). The Finance Minister, Taro Aso, dismissed the allegations against Fukuda, saying the two had "talked" and he saw no need to take the matter further. He later grumbled about Fukuda's human rights, hinted that he had been victim of a "honey trap," and said that sexual harassment was not, in any case, illegal in Japan. The way to stop harassment of women reporters, he said, is to replace them with men (McNeill and Matsumoto 2018). Instead of launching a third-party investigation into the claims, Finance Ministry bureaucrats posted Fukuda's denials on its Web site and called for his victims to come forward for interview—with its own team of hired lawyers. Japan's newspaper unions condemned this move as a tactic of "intimidation." In response to this incident, in May 2018, women journalists formed an informal network (Women in Media Network in Japan: WiMN) to fight sexual harassment in their male-dominated field. Most of them joined anonymously for the fear of further harassment and losing their sources, but more than 100 women journalists joined by September.¹⁰

The Fukuda incident motivated more than 200 people to gather at the National Diet to protest the Ministry of Finance and Minister Aso. Within that same week, young women took to the streets with the slogan “we won’t keep silent.” That week in April of 2017 was a critical moment for the #MeToo movement in Japan. The Fukuda scandal triggered a wider attempt to change the industry, inspired by the global #MeToo response, but in Japan, victims remained anonymous (McNeill and Matsumoto 2018).

In journalism, the percentage of women reporters nearly doubled to about 20% since 2001 when the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association began collecting data. But women occupy just 5.6% of managerial posts in newspapers and wire services (they fare better in broadcasting: 13.7%). A survey this year found that a third of the perpetrators of sexual harassment against female reporters were police officers, politicians, or government officials (see McCurry 2018). According to the Prospectus for Establishing WiMN, “Women journalists have not been able to raise their voices due to a sense of shame instilled in them and anxiety over the possibility of losing important news sources. We finally realized that we ourselves have long been among the voiceless. We are both encouraged by the television reporter’s claim and committed to taking action against any sexual harassment and all forms of discrimination” (WiMN 2018). Note that most of those participants remain anonymous.

On the ground, women in civil society have begun to discuss legal reforms regarding sexual harassment at work and in government and are lobbying the main parties in the legislature with proposals.¹¹ Because the Ministry of Justice reported that only 17% of perpetrators are actually sentenced for rape, politicians, such as Mizuho Fukushima (who served as a former head of the Gender Equality Bureau) and Cabinet minister, Seiko Noda, both stated they want to do more to help victims. Women journalists even met with Seiko Noda, the minister in charge of both women’s empowerment and gender equality, about a bill that could finally make sexual harassment a crime (McNeill and Matsumoto 2018). However, nothing concrete has materialized, and no new bills have been proposed thus far.

Conclusion

Women going public without having to hide their identities has helped to inspire more women to speak out and expand the movement in South Korea. Though women did come out to protest nuclear power (environmental issues) and the security bills in Japan (peace activists), they did not come out for #MeToo. Japan’s emphasis on group harmony creates powerful cultural and social pressures for sexual harassment and violence to remain a private matter. This social pressure to avoid confrontation and the disruption of social harmony makes it very hard for women to go public. Therefore,

in Japan, sexual harassment is still a private problem, whereas in South Korea, women became more emboldened to speak about it publicly because of their recent participation in political demonstrations and activism related to femicide and hidden camera abuse.

The nature and degree of media coverage in both countries also differed and helped to either advance or depress the movement's growth and impact in each case. There was greater coverage of the stories of sexual harassment and assault in South Korea, and the media gave more of a platform to victims, which allowed for the movement to have more of an impact and further inspire women to go public. In Japan, however, there were far fewer cases of women who went public, and the mainstream domestic media coverage did not cover their stories to the same degree. The re-victimization of these women who do go public through media scrutiny and online trolling, only reinforces social norms and pressures for women to keep these matters private, especially if they want to keep their jobs and careers. Even those who are coming forward now are doing it anonymously.

The power of speaking up and the belief in other women's experiences is what makes #MeToo significant. It made women confident to speak in their own words from their own perspectives. Rather than through the courts or law, women's collective speaking out has resulted in the resignation and firings of powerful men. #MeToo helps to further shine a light on the persistent inequalities women face in the workplace, society, and in politics, and reflects the deeply patriarchal and sexist values and practices that continue to pose barriers for women seeking accountability and justice for harassment and sexual violence. Because the gatekeepers in politics, law, and the workplace are usually men and women with more conservative values, change will take time.

In Korea, the #MeToo movement impacted virtually all fields, including law, politics, academia, entertainment, and the arts. Many women joined this historical wave of speaking out and sharing their experiences. The #MeToo movement has not been as powerful in Japan, but it definitely had an impact in several high-profile cases. While #MeToo produced different outcomes in Japan and South Korea, both countries witnessed a powerful backlash in response—often with accusations that #MeToo was being weaponized to destroy the careers and lives of males accused and through the vicious online trolling of women who spoke out. Japanese and Korean culture are still very patriarchal and perpetuate ideas that it is the woman's responsibility or fault and that she should endure harassment rather than upset group dynamics or bring attention to the harassment or violence.

Moving forward, the following issues must be addressed to promote the kind of cultural and legal space in which women can speak out and seek justice: the fact that harassment is not a crime and rape is so narrowly defined; that there are no comprehensive laws preventing sexual violence (Cho 2018); the need for

more support services for sexual assault survivors (Ito 2017); the need for more women in decision-making bodies so that policies and practices can be more inclusive of women and victims' concerns and experiences (Shin 2018); and the need for educational and other initiatives that promote a culture of consent. Early education is the key and discussions about consent must begin in elementary schools and be scaffolded by educational initiatives to address how rape culture is created and perpetuated.

Gatekeepers in the media and other industries can also be more intentional about how victims are portrayed versus male perpetrators in their coverage of such cases, especially with respect to victim-blaming. It is also important for local and national governments to continue to fund or to expand funding to existing organizations and services in support of survivors after assault, and to change police investigation and medical examination procedures that can further humiliate and re-traumatize victims of sexual violence (Ogasawara 2011). Coordinating efforts across the Ministries of Education, Health, Labor, and Justice in service of addressing the issues of consent, rape culture, sexual harassment, and sexual violence could help to tackle this issue more systematically. For Japan, the Ministry of Justice must take leadership in reevaluating the process once a complaint is filed as those procedures have not been changed since 1907. In 2009 and 2014 the United Nations raised concerns about Japan's penal code, which says rape can only be investigated if the victim files a complaint. The Special Research Group on Violence Against Women within Japan's Gender Equality Bureau also recommended amendments to the 1880 penal code (Buchanan 2017).

This all requires a shift in an unequal power structure and culture about women and girls more broadly, and that means addressing rape and violence in movies, television, anime, manga, advertising, the music industry, and other professions and industries that perpetuate and normalize rape culture and incentivize silence about sexual violence and harassment. Substantive changes in practices in the workplace, society, and the legal and penal systems must follow the empowerment and awareness #MeToo, #WeToo, and #WithYou have created for the movement to have a long-term and meaningful impact on the rights of women around the world.

Notes

1. "A Conversation with Tarana Burke: Founder of the Me Too Movement" hosted by the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia on August 14, 2018, at the Suzanne Roberts Theater in Philadelphia, PA.
2. Alyssa Milano is a film and TV actress and feminist activist who is active on Twitter. This is her original tweet: https://twitter.com/alyssa_milano/status/919659438700670976?lang=en. She has used her platform to create greater awareness about various feminist issues. Her original tweet was in response to Harvey Weinstein and the problem of sexual harassment in the film industry in Hollywood and to elevate Burke's movement (see King 2017).

3. Japan is the 114th and South Korea the 118th on the Global Gender Gap Index 2017 by the World Economic Forum. See: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2017/> (December 9, 2018).
4. Women, however, are also active participants in demonstrations and protest rallies in Japan. For example, a large number of women participated in the demonstrations against nuclear power and Japan's security bills. On March 11, 2011, the northeastern coastal area of Japan (the Tohoku region, which is about 227–48 miles north of Tokyo) was struck by a 9.0 earthquake, which triggered a tsunami. The waves went over the protective barriers at a local nuclear power plant and caused its cooling system to malfunction. This brought attention to the problems of regulating the nuclear power plant industry and galvanized women, especially mothers to protest the government over nuclear power. In the summer of 2015 thousands protested the passage of the national government's security bills, which would mark a shift from Japan's pacifist orientation and significantly empower its military to take action abroad.
5. "Comfort women" is the English translation of the term "ianfu/wianbu" used in World War II-era Japanese government documents to refer to women and girls held in sexual servitude to the Japanese military during the 1930s and 1940s. Although open to critical appraisal, it is the term most often used in scholarly and many activist circles in the United States. An estimated 80% of these women were from the Korean peninsula (McCarthy, Mary and Hasunuma 2018). Kim Hak Sun was the first women to go public with her experience as a comfort woman (Allen 2015).
6. No Japanese woman came forward and spoke out.
7. See: http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/830046.html (September 14, 2018).
8. See: Lee, Yong-chang. 2018. "61.6% Women in Prosecutor's Office Experienced Sexual Violence and Harassment." <http://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201805171494083817> (accessed August 17, 2018).
9. "The wording of these laws, which has remained virtually unamended since 1907, is characteristically broad and does not really enlighten us as to how rape is understood in the Japanese courtroom. Legal scholar George Koshi attempts to clarify this by outlining the key aspects of rape law: (1) penetration of the vagina by the penis, (2) without the consent of the victim, (3) achieved by the perpetrator's use of force or intimidation" (Burns 2004, 85).
10. Interview with Yoshiko Hayashi, cofounder of WiMN (September 9, 2018).
11. Interview with Kanoko Kamata, on October 13, 2018. She is a community organizer and activist in Japan who has been lobbying members of Japan's main parties with proposals to better protect women from harassment and sexual violence.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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