

## **#MeToo as a Variegated Phenomenon against Men's Violences and Violations: Implications for Men and Masculinities**

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**Abstract:** #MeToo has also become a long-term, complex, expanding, transnational, and variegated phenomenon, metaphorically marked by different hues that stem from men's violences and violations. To speak of variegation in this way is to seek to address the dynamic picture across political and spatial shifts, movements and interpretations rather than talking only of diversity or multiplicity. The chapter focuses, first, on what appears distinctive about #MeToo, by way of the metaphor of variegation, in terms of: cyberpolitics, online-/offline; celebrities and the significance of workplaces; the relations of individuals and collectivities; memory, forgetting and surprise; and shifts across sexual harassment, sexual violence, violences. The latter part of the chapter considers the implications of such variegation are for critical analysis, politics, policy and practice of men and masculinities, specifically in terms of: absence-presence; and causes-positionings-responses, that is the differing positionings of men and masculinities before, during and after violences and violations, in relation to #MeToo – before concluding comments on changing men and masculinities.

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In October 2017, following increasing public allegations, the US actor, activist, producer and singer, Alyssa Milano, initiated a new viral #MeToo campaign. In this, she aimed to gather support for women who had experienced violence and abuse, show solidarity with those who come forward and those who, for various reasons, do not feel able to do so, and highlight the extent of violence and abuse. Such personal – sometimes collective – testimonies are an established method in feminist and other consciousness-raising movements, but now these are not only local and face-to-face, as in, say, CR groups, but speak across borders worldwide. Thus, #MeToo is all about women speaking out (Hill Collins, 1990).

At the same time, #MeToo has also become and is a long-term, complex, expanding, transnational, and variegated phenomenon, metaphorically marked by different hues, that stems from men's violences, abuse and broader violations. To speak of variegation in this way is to seek to address the dynamic picture across political and spatial shifts, movements and interpretations than talking only of diversity or multiplicity. In this chapter, I focus on two main issues: first, what appears distinctive, and in some ways new, about #MeToo, by way of the metaphor of variegation; and, second, the implications of such variegation for critical analysis, politics, policy and practice of men and masculinities.

Before going further, there are two clarifications that I should make. First, in using the term, 'men's violences and violations', in the title, I seek to recognise the wide range of different kinds of violence, abuse and broader violation enacted by men, and the dangers of conflating their

'#MeToo as a variegated phenomenon against men's violences and abuse: Implications for men and masculinities', in G. Chandra and I. Erlingsdóttir (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of the #MeToo Movement*, Routledge, London, 2021, pp. 65-84. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-the-Politics-of-the-MeToo-Movement/Chandra-Erlingsdottir/p/book/9780367408473>

various forms and impacts with each other.<sup>1</sup> Second, in speaking of ‘men’ I refer to men as a social category, in terms of those who define themselves and are defined by others as such, not as a bio-essentialised ontology. The social category of men is formed within gender hegemony, in concrete everyday life and institutional practices, in interplay with other social categories such as class, ethnicity, sexuality, within which men act, agentically, both individually and as collectivities. To analyse and engage politically with this means both naming the social category of men, as a social reality, and deconstructing that category, making the Ones the Others (Hearn, 2004, 2015; Lykke, 2010).

### **The Variegated Phenomenon of #MeToo**

In this section, I outline five distinctive variegated features of the #MeToo phenomenon: cyberpolitics, online-/offline; celebrities and the significance of workplaces; the relations of individuals and collectivities; memory, forgetting and surprise; and shifts across sexual harassment, sexual violence, violences.

#### ***Cyberpolitics, online-/offline***

#MeToo is an example of contemporary cyberpolitics of sexuality and violence, made and facilitated through internet and other socio-technological social relations and affordances. It parallels and builds on many interactive projects in many parts of the world, such as the UK ‘Everyday Sexism’ operative since 2012 (Bates, 2014) or the Swedish #prataomdet [#talkaboutit]. The latter followed on from sexual allegations against Julian Assange and led onto vivid discussions of policy and practice on sexual consent (Strid, 2015). A significant aspect of such virtual politics is that they often seem to have both a (younger) generational profile as well as working across generations.

#MeToo makes use of the characteristic features and affordances of ICTs, including: time/space compression of distance and physical separation, instantaneousness in real time, asynchronicity, reproducibility of images, creation of virtual bodies, blurring of the ‘real’ and the ‘representational’, and online/offline; wireless portability; globalised connectivity; and personalisation (Hearn and Parkin, 2001; Wellman, 2001; Mays and Thoburn, 2013). Specifically, it is an example of what has been called crowd-enabled connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012: 13), whereby, arguably, the message is also the medium. Most importantly, the very technologies that may be used to harass, bully, and violate, to undermine gender/sexual citizenship through a variety of internet-based abuses, including sexual violences, cyberstalking, upskirting and much more, can now also be used to enhance that citizenship (Hearn, 2006). The wider, in some ways, contradictory context of cyberpolitics is one way of framing #MeToo.

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<sup>1</sup> Issues of terminology and conceptualisation around the terms, the pluralising of ‘the violences of men’, and ‘violations’, are elaborated further elsewhere (Hearn, 1998c; Hearn and Parkin, 2001).

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There is now a significant amount of research and informed (online) commentary on whether and how tweeting and online campaigns more generally bring social change. Such interventions appear to have been influential, at least at the margins, in some high-profile national elections and referenda, and also in some single-issue campaigns, such as around specific law reform and collective consumer actions. Having said that, this is not to isolate the online and the offline from each other. Indeed, it is often difficult, or even impossible, to distinguish clearly between online and offline politics and movements, as there is such significant blurring or convergence across the online-offline boundary, through mobile phone culture and ICTs more generally (Barker and Jane, 2015). This position is, however, not so straightforward when it comes to how progressive political actors and movements relate to, and indeed at times experience, the matter of direct physical violence, its threat, and less directly physical forms of violation.

Cyberpolitics can be a means to rapid, if uneven, transnational spreading of ideas, information and interventions. With #MeToo, this has been amply illustrated. On Facebook, the hashtag was reported as used by more than 4.7 million people in 12 million posts during the first 24 hours (Santiago and Criss, 2017). Joan Williams and colleagues report:

Almost immediately, the percentage of Americans who believe that sexual harassment is a serious problem shot up to 64%. [Langer, 2017] By late 2017, roughly 75% of Americans believed that sexual harassment and assault were “very important” issues for the country. [Oliphant, 2017] That is a norm cascade. (Williams et al. 2019: 142)

A year later, by October 2018, “... Pew Research Center found that the #MeToo hashtag was used more than 19 million times on Twitter since Milano's initial tweet.”<sup>21</sup> The initial launch of #MeToo spawned a whole range of other campaigns, and also policy initiatives, and strong examples of immediate collective awareness and action. In Sweden, where the movement grew rapidly, with 70,000 women signing by late November 2017, and there is talk of a ‘social revolution’.<sup>3</sup> In neighbouring Finland, the movement caught on more slowly, with initial significant responses in schools, the military, and the arts, but since having effects across society and generations.

To use some immediate local examples: two universities where I work – Örebro University, Sweden, and Hanken School of Economics, Finland – quickly produced new, if very different, policy statements. The first used what was, to my mind, the rather strange and elusive frame being against ‘power language’ within a long, convoluted statement from management, while the latter simply highlighted on 1 December 2017 zero tolerance with the public headline: “Hanken has zero tolerance policy against harassments”, with the clarification “The social media campaigns #metoo and #dammenbrister has gained a lot of attention both in Finland and internationally. The aim with the campaigns is to draw attention to the problems with widespread sexual harassments. Hanken wants to ensure that the School is a safe place for both students and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/10/13/metoo-impact-hashtag-made-online/1633570002/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/darfor-blev-metoo-uppropen-sa-starka-i-sverige/>

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staff. There is a ‘zero tolerance’ policy against harassments in all of Hanken. If a student or an employee experiences any kind of harassments at Hanken it is important to report it”,<sup>4</sup> followed by specified contact points for consultation and action.

### *Celebrities and the significance of workplaces*

#MeToo seems, initially at least, to have been driven by reactions and responses to high profile individual cases of what has often been characterised as sexual harassment, confirmed or alleged, by specific individual men in the public eye. In particular, it appears to have been prompted by revelations about and against men celebrities, made sometimes by women celebrities, sometimes by less well-known women. Thus, the hashtag can partly be seen as an offshoot of media and popular interest in, and perhaps antagonism to, celebrity culture, even whilst the initial focus on revelations of sexual harassment and assault from the ‘entertainment’ industry has broadened to other male-dominated sectors, notably politics and certain professions, but also, much more widely, across local and societal spaces, between countries and importantly a in transnational cyberspace.

Perhaps significantly, from the very beginning #MeToo became almost synonymous with Harvey Weinstein, the allegations against him, and in due course the court case, and his conviction and punishment were clear landmarks. This intensification also followed on from the emergence of his hypocrisy after his previous conspicuous public support for various progressive causes. #MeToo took off fast and with much wider impact than there was following the cases of, for example, Bill Cosby or the late Jimmy Savile (so vile), White British disc jockey and television personality.

Cosby was represented on the *The Cosby Show* and other television programmes as an advocate of family-oriented humour, and a genial role model of middle-class, fatherly masculinity, within a financially secure, Black, middle-class, family, not least through the transfer of persona from television idol to assumed “real life”. In September 2018, he was convicted on three counts of aggravated indecent assault and sentenced to three to ten years in prison. Savile pursued multiple television activities and combined this with both a determinedly eccentric public persona, in both dress and behaviour, that seemed to facilitate bodily intrusions on others, especially women and even more so children, and a very high-profile commitment to charitable causes, especially around work with children in hospitals. In all three cases, albeit in apparently very different ways, these three men cultivated a very positive image of “goodness” and “progressivism”, whilst apparently doing the obverse.

The initial impulse of #MeToo can thus be seen, in part or as part of, an accumulation of reaction against celebrity cases. Seen in the UK context, it seems in some ways a follow-up to earlier major allegations against a plethora of “show business” (a term now with new meanings) sexual abuse cases of children, young people and women by leading British men made public over recent years. Seen in the US context, it might have been, in part, a delayed, cumulative reaction to and anger against Trump’s blatant boasting of “grabbing pussy”, and for the accumulating

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hanken.fi/en/news/hanken-has-zero-tolerance-policy-against-harassments>

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(connective?) energy of Trump's accusers, as well as the contradictory appeal of and repulsion against his televisual sadism, as exemplified in *The Apprentice*.

Many of the initial reports in the #MeToo movement were derived from male-dominated industries, with the focus on male actors, directors, producers, parliamentarians, lawyers, journalists, academics, technologists, and the like. More privileged, gendered, class, status, high visibility, and occupational sectors figured strongly. Studies of women entering male-dominated sectors have long reported more harassment, perhaps part of the policing of occupational boundaries by men, whilst women in more stereotypical female jobs have sometimes under-reported, perhaps because of different gendered-sexual expectations in such jobs (e.g. Gutek and Morasch, 1982; Leeds TUCRIC, 1983). However, the #MeToo movement spread much more widely to non-white collar and working-class sectors such as the construction industry, and to arenas where women were numerically well-represented. More directly, gender-sexual power, sexual harassment and other sexual violences and violations have long and often gone together (Hearn and Parkin, 1987/1995). In the case of the UK Parliament:

“Young staff members who surround British lawmakers have no independent personnel body to appeal to if they have complaints. Instead, they are told to inform party whips, in-house disciplinarians who were widely believed to stockpile compromising information for their own purposes. Newspapers, for their part, have often sat on reports of abuse rather than risk libel claims.” (Barry, 2017)

A key aspect in some workplace contexts has concerned protection given to certain high status, high performing employees, even if the benefit to an employer of retaining a very productive but “toxic” employee, such as a sexual harasser, may be far outweighed by the cost of keeping them (Housman and Minor, 2015). Indeed, such employees tend to drive out other employees, whilst being seen as minor local organisational ‘celebrities’. However, with new technologies, gig employment, neoliberal individualisation of value, and what might be called the ‘superstar economy’ (in the local sense), whereby the successful can leverage much more, may mean:

“the rest of the economy is becoming more like Hollywood, where a small group of stars have long reaped a huge portion of the rewards. That means more bosses and boards may soon face decisions about whether to stand up to harassers or to overlook their behavior.” (Scheiber, 2017).

More broadly, some differences can be noted in the processes that may take place in and around #MeToo between celebrities (whether local, national or international) and non-celebrities, which includes the great majority of us. For a start, allegations against celebrities are higher profile, attract (often prurient) interest from the wider local, national or international community or readership, may bring high risks for the allegor (as with whistleblowing), with possible retaliations and unforeseen consequences, even if those accused are punished in some way. Allegations against ‘non-celebrities’ are less noticed or may be hardly noticed, even where they have huge implications and effects for the immediate parties.

Some cautious comparison can be made here with differential processes for celebrities and non-celebrities who become targets of internet-based sexual abuse, popularly called ‘revenge porn’,

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where the internet is used for opposite or inverse purposes (Hall and Hearn, 2017). High profile cases of revenge porn directed against, for example, Jennifer Lawrence and the Duchess of Cambridge, have figured strongly in the mass media, and some ‘non-celebrities’ have been forced into public view, occasionally embracing that position to campaign against online and other abuses, for example, the Lebanese US American, Mia Khalifa. Her former work career in the pornography industry was short-lived, with her most famous scene showing her performing sex acts whilst wearing a hijab. After leaving the industry, images of her became and remain widely circulated. She subsequently campaigned against their use and against pornography more generally (BBC, 2019). This process attracted condemnation, especially from women, and titillation, especially for some men, transnationally, in both Islamic and non-Islamic regions.

Meanwhile, there are millions subjected to online abuse that remain nameless. Change in harassment, violence and abuse in organisations and workplaces depends on fundamental change in hierarchical, gendered, aged, classed, ethnicised, and racialised workplaces.

### *The relations of individuals and collectivities*

There are a number of individualisms in play in the expansion of #MeToo, against celebrities, in allegations, responses, reactions, and experiences in the listing of individual incidents. By and large, it is individuals, rather than groups, collectives or organisations, who, at least initially, have tweeted, or have been or are, active in some other way online, whether regarding their own experience of violence, abuse or violation, supporting those who have had similar experiences. This is exemplified in the “me” of “metoo”. The highlighting of the “me” can be interpreted in many different ways, ranging from embodied claiming and the claiming of bodily integrity, through to the personal as political, onto resonances with neoliberal individualism. It may be seen as paralleling the current “I AM” campaign against modern slavery<sup>5</sup> or going further back to the “I am a man” campaigns of the Black men sanitary workers in Memphis, 1968.<sup>6</sup> This is speaking the I through pain.

The status of the “me” and the “I” can be various, contradictory, and indeed strongly gendered, especially within neoliberal culture and economy, as speaking (feminist) truth to power, taking/owning personal responsibility, reduction to (male) ego or the avoidance of all or any of these. At the same time, the “too” of “metoo” suggests, or simply states, there are (many) others to be allied with. In this way, it links (the) one and the other(s), perhaps structure and agency. The “too” of “metoo” may also link the mostly unknown, perhaps anonymous, individual harassed or assaulted women with celebrities or proto-celebrities. In keeping with reality shows and the rest, this may be understood as a democratisation, a solidarisation, of (unwanted) fame. While the “me” or the “I” is asserted, it is also, partially, transcended, anonymised in numbers, in solidarity, a form of optimistic, collective, democratisation.

### *Memory, forgetting and surprise*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iamcampaign.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/i-am-a-man>

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#MeToo has been associated, especially from beyond the movement, with some loss of memory and some element of surprise that ‘these things’ still happen, in the film industry, theatre, media, law, even universities – as if surely there are policies to deal with kind of thing! Such expressions of surprise are especially interesting in societies with a relatively strong tradition of gender equality policies - for example, the Nordic countries. However, such countries do not necessarily have a long tradition of well-developed policies and practices to respond to and prevent sexual harassment. The recent discussions and disclosures on sexual harassment in the film industry and other arenas seem to have surprised some people, even with some claims in the media that there is little research on this. People should not be so surprised. There is a whole genre, or genres, of books on the ‘Casting Couch’, some fictional some factual, some factual (Halperin, 2008; Jaher, 2014; Zimmer, 2017).<sup>7</sup>

More generally, sexual harassment is far from new; it is just that it was not always called that. There are many examples chronicled from the nineteenth century (MacKinnon, 1979; Lambertz, 1985; Bratton, 1987; Husu et al., 1995). Mary Bulzarik (1978: 25) has shown how victims of sexual harassment during that time were in all occupational areas:

... railway cashiers, union organizers, garment workers, whitegoods workers, home workers, doctors, dressmakers, shopgirls, laundry workers, models, office workers, cotton mill workers, cannery workers ... broom factory workers, assistant foremen [sic], stenographers and typists, soap factory workers, hop-pickers, shoe shine girls, barmaids, legal secretaries, actresses, sales demonstrators, art students, and would-be workers at employment interviews.

Such sexual harassment often went uncategorised and unpunished. A case of interest from 1891-1892 in Nelson, Lancashire, UK, concerned a mill overlooker, Houghton Greenwood, who was found guilty by an external inquiry of three clergymen of “making immoral proposals to a married woman”, and “using indecent language to other females”. Moreover, their report stated “... the offences of which we have been compelled to adjudge Houghton Greenwood guilty, are not uncommon among men who have the oversight of the female operatives in other mills ...” (Fowler, 1985; Hearn, 1992a: 128-129). Whether he subsequently lost his job is not clear. This kind of framing contrasts with the nineteenth century legal categorisation of what would now be called sexual harassment as “outraging the modesty of women”.

More to the contemporary point, research and policy on sexual harassment have become well, if unevenly, developed, since its explicit naming and categorisation as such in the 1970s. For example, over 30 years ago in 1987, the Finnish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs published a survey and bibliography detailing 341 publications and no less than ten bibliographies on sexual harassment (Högbacka et al., 1987). The same year, Wendy Parkin and I published “*Sex at Work*” (Hearn and Parkin, 1987/1995), and Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1987) published

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<sup>7</sup> Also see: [https://www.revolvvy.com/main/index.php?s=Casting%20couch&item\\_type=topic](https://www.revolvvy.com/main/index.php?s=Casting%20couch&item_type=topic)

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*Georgie Porgie: Sexual Harassment in Everyday Life*, in which they argued against the “percentage of women who have experienced sexual harassment” approach, as all women have experienced it.

A few years ago saw the ‘discovery’ in Finland that sexual harassment actually occurs in the national parliament (Niemi, 2010). Even though there had just been major harassment scandals earlier, for example, concerning the former parliamentary Speaker, Matti Ahde (Puustinen, 2002), this seemed to take much mainstream media by surprise. What is it that keeps it being rediscovered? Why is it surprising? Do people have bad memories? Is it a generational quirk that the older do not tell the younger? Or is it that the younger assume that the problem has been resolved until they experience it, and then maybe think it a ‘one-off’ individual problem? So, how can loss of (individual and collective) memory be overcome? To deal with these questions and articulate credible responses often requires much reframing. Long-term political vigilance and institutional transformation are necessary; otherwise, there may well be more, repeated ‘surprise’ rediscoveries and campaigns followed by gender business as usual.

### ***Shifts across sexual harassment, sexual violence, violences***

More critically, the movement has often been framed, especially from the outside and in public media, more in terms of sexual harassment, and much less in terms of the wider questions of sexual violence, sexual assault, rape and gender/sexual domination, exploitation and oppression, or indeed further harassments by, for example, age, disability, and racialisation. Having said that, these further violences are recognised in some commentaries. For example, the Facebook group #allavi [#allofus], started by the Swedish parliamentarian Maria Robsham, soon gained over 30,000 members, with women posting their experiences under the explicit naming of sexual violence [*sexualiserat våld*], that is, not only sexual harassment,<sup>8</sup> in keeping with the continuum of sexual violence.

Many commentaries outside the movement focus on sexual harassment, yet #MeToo is much wider than that, and perhaps especially so when broadened from workplaces to all aspects of life including established personal, friendship, and sexual relationships. This moves the debate from being primarily about workplace harassment towards questions of, for example, coercive control (Stark, 2007), pressurised sex, coercive sex, and violences and abuse (Kelly, 1988). Indeed, “distinctions between assaults later defined as rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, flashing, coercive sex, pressurised sex, incestuous abuse may slide into one another, and may be subject to differential experience, interpretation, and redefinition over time (Kelly, 1988).” (Hearn and Parkin, 1989: 230).

#MeToo brings women together across various kinds of borders - national, class, or ethnic; women come to know of other women elsewhere with similar experiences of violation. What is less clear-cut is how and whether such online movements necessarily change persistent gendered

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/han-har-inga-skivor-men-sager-att-han-vill-se-mina-fina-brost/>

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social structures. To cite a parallel: there can be online campaigns against poverty that bring progress, but inequality continues to grow globally and intra-societally, if not necessarily inter-societally. Whether #MeToo leads to lasting collective action and solidarity and fundamental change in gender/sexual power relations can only be answered in due course. It is possible that #MeToo and similar connective political activities raise women's voices, consciousness and solidarity, in the short term, leading, or not, to policy change, but that these are not enforced by what has been called feminist implementation (Callerstig, 2014), so that structural, unequal, gender power relations of gendered violence do not change so much. It is unlikely sexual violence will decrease significantly if societies and institutions remain fundamentally and structurally gender unequal.

This perspective concerns how wider social change in one societal domain, namely violence, intersects with another domain, polity, as its context, as well as with economy and civil society (Walby, 2009). Seen thus, there would be hope for structural change since social revolutions may occur in multiple domains simultaneously, if unevenly, with potential to disrupt the hegemony of the gender regime increasing with changes in each domain. This directs attention to the complex form and structure of (gendered) violence regimes (Hearn et al., 2020), including anti-violence structures, as well as possible paradoxes between relatively high levels of gender equality on some measures remaining accompanied by relatively high levels of reported sexual violence.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, #MeToo and the responses to it can be conceptualised as part of broader violence regimes and their change over time. This includes how violence is seen, framed, reacted to, and voiced (Balkmar et al., 2020), and linked to anti-violence politics, policy and practice, which together make the conditions of gender-sexual relations. Seen thus, #MeToo is about much more than the reporting of the specific experiences of women, as it is a key aspect of intersectional gender relations more generally. Framing #MeToo in terms of violence, specifically gender-based violence, shifts understanding from framing it only or primarily in terms of sexual harassment, with the possibility, then, of some commentators also framing it explicitly or implicitly in part in relation to sexuality.

The latter possibility of framing #MeToo in terms of sexuality raises some complex issues. On one hand, it might be seen as playing down the overriding issues of violence, abuse and violations, as just noted; on the other, this perspective might suggest seeing #MeToo as part of historical shifts in social-sexual relations, and what might be called (trans)societal sexual regimes. #MeToo both speaks out against sexual violence, abuse and violation, and also contributes to problematising certain kinds of taken-for-granted (hetero)sexuality and patriarchal (hetero)sexual relations. Such questions also figure in, for example, different ways in which media report #MeToo in terms of what may be implicit assumptions of, for example, uncontrolled or uncontrollable male sexualities. Sexuality may be highlighted more explicitly on at least media agendas when speaking out in #MeToo mode moves onto same-sex sexual

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<sup>9</sup> The conceptualisation, measurement and comparative analysis of violence regimes is the focus of the Swedish Research Council project, 'Regimes of Violence: Theorising and Explaining Variations in the Production of Violence in Welfare State Regimes, project 2017-01914, led by Sofia Strid.

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harassment and sexual assault, as in some high-profile cases, most notably that of the US actor, Kevin Spacey.

### **Implications of #MeToo for Men and Masculinities ...**

The long-term, variegated nature of #MeToo acts as a context for the more specific consideration of the positionings of men, with numerous implications for men as perpetrators, observers, commentators, and activists, and the critical analysis thereof. Here I focus on two main aspects – absence-presence and causes-positionings-responses – before some concluding comments on changing men and masculinities.

#### ***Absence-presence***

#MeToo is, in relation to men, an example of absent presence. It is clearly primarily about women’s speaking out against violence, sexual violence, and gender-based violence, even whilst it has led onto similar initiatives in relation to same-sex violence and abuse, and violence and abuse to LGBTIQ+ people. So, how does this relate to what men have done, and are doing and experiencing? Men are an absence presence from #MeToo; generally absent from the speaking out, but all too present, in statements, allusions and effects. Men are the absent cause of #MeToo, who then become the object of talk, writing, allegation, accusation, and action: #MeToo stems from men’s violences and abuse, from a collection of absent-present superordinates (Hearn, 1998b, 2020).

While #MeToo has successfully expanded, as well as bringing criticism for the onus being on women, and the shortcomings of one size fitting all,<sup>10</sup> it still comes down, in short, to changing men and stopping men’s violences, abuse and violations more generally. Men need to stop, change, and not get away with it. This problematic has raised some spinoff questions, that have at times become controversial amongst women and further genders, in terms of, first, to what extent women should bother with this question of men in relation to #MeToo or at all, and, second, what men should do about this. The Canadian activist and journalist, Meaghan Murphy, wrote as early as October 2017,

“It might seem the worst time to ask the question that has become a joke in and of itself — *What about the men?* — but it’s on my mind. Who *are* the people who have caused legions of #MeToos to take over my Facebook feed? And what do we want from them? If anything?”

She continued:

“While some women may not (fair enough), I *do* want your apology. I *do* want you to say something now, because now is better than never. ... I also want you to support the work women are doing to fight back. I want you to donate to your local women’s shelter, show

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<sup>10</sup> <http://blogs.khaleejtimes.com/2017/10/19/why-i-didnt-join-the-hashtag-me-too-bandwagon/>

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up for our anti-prostitution rallies, fundraise, cook and clear plates at feminist events, support feminist media, stop watching pornography, and step in when you see a woman being harassed or intimidated.”

And concluded: “Yes, #MeToo is for women. But I do want something from men: hold yourself accountable and hold other men accountable, because, *yes*, this is about you too.” (Murphy, 2017). This led on to a very active set of reactions from women, articulating different positions of the questions raised of what, if anything, to do with or deal with men in the general or the specifics. So how to locate absent-present superordinates?

### *Causes-positionings-responses*

Men are the cause of #MeToo, but also figure in a wide variety of ways in relation to the phenomenon and the movement. There is not space to present more than a brief overview of men’s relations to violences, abuse and violations, but some general comments may help to set the scene.

- *men are members of a social category* invested with relative power, including, in some contexts, power as violence, if only by association. Violence can be an accepted, if not always acceptable, way of being a man, and a reference point for being boys and men;
- *men enact most violence*, especially planned, repeated, heavy, physically damaging, non-defensive, premeditated, non-retaliatory, sexual, forms of interpersonal violence, along with most economic, collective, institutional, organised, public, communal, gang, military, and paramilitary violence, which are themselves often interpersonal. Some men, or specific groupings of men, are expert specialists in violence to women, children, each other, animals, selves; such violences may reinforce each other;
- *men’s violences are done to those other than men, and by men to men, between men*. Men, especially subordinated groupings of men, by, for example, class or race, may be expendable, sometimes in large numbers, whilst maintaining other men’s domination;
- *men’s violences can be a means to an end*, enforcing and solidifying established power and control, maintaining patriarchal domination or routinely reaffirming power in intimate relationships; and can also be a reaction to loss of or perceived loss of or threat to power, or a way of resisting others’ power, whether subordinate or superordinate;
- in terms of identity, *men’s violences can be a source of pride, be shameful, and/or be ambiguous*; constructions of men, masculinity, and violence may thus be quite contradictory (Hearn, 2012, 2013).

#MeToo results from various aspects of men’s perpetration and relation to violences, abuse and violations. Men are located with different positionings on #MeToo, within the general context of societal, gendered, intersectional (and violent) relations and violence regimes: doing, witnessing,

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supporting, opposing violence, and women's speaking out on violence. This includes how men figure in: what went before, the doing of violence, being the object of allegation and accusation, their own immediate and subsequent reaction to being accused, and wider responses, both to specific allegations and the movement generally, along with the emotions involved (Hearn and Parkin, 2007). These actions and positionings operate offline, online, and offline/online.

#MeToo is partly constructed around framing and sometimes reframing what has happened in the past, around specific events. But it is still instructive to ask: *what went before?* I certainly do not mean this in terms of "what provoked men's actions?", but rather how unacceptable, violating actions came to be normalised before the remembered events and specific actions concerned were done. The point here is that many violations and potential violations build on earlier collusive actions between men, and indeed between boys and between young men. So, what happened arises not just from that moment in time and place, but from actions out of sight of women and girls. What may be experienced as a specific incident or a series of incidents or a lifetime series of events are the result of an accumulation of structural advantages of and 'cultural' collusions between men, and not only in the immediate bodily enactments with women and girls. Some of this perspective fits with that which emphasises the importance of homosocial peer relations between men in explaining men's violence to women (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2013, 2016). These background invisibilities construct what happened, and to what extent they are performed with or without consciousness of violence. Even without leaning on a socialisation perspective on the accumulation of violations, there may well be 'open secrets' that certain men are serial predators, as was, and is now, clear with Weinstein.

Next, there is *the doing of the violence, abuse and violation in all their very many forms and varieties*, the violating events later recalled and written about by women. Their form, specifics, harm, and impact are given meaning, in part, by the context in which they take place. For example, are they done in a long-established or trusting relationship, are they done one-on-one or along with or by a group of men? Doing the violence, abuse and violation can refer to a particular action or set of actions or an accumulation of many actions over a longer period of time by the same perpetrator, or various violences perpetrated by different men: these are what are recalled and written on by the women. Thus, related questions, in relation to men, are: how are the men concerned framed, and how do they frame their own actions? How conscious are or were they of their actions as violating, how normalised? My own and collaborative research suggests a high level of intentionality to harm with direct physical violence against women and some forms of online sexual abuse (Hearn, 1998c; Hall and Hearn, 2017). However, intention to harm in some situations that may certainly be experienced as violation may for various reasons – some more understandable, some not – be less clear or more ambiguous. For example, some forms of hugging and cheek kissing have different meanings depending on context, and may (or may not) be experienced as violation, especially when repeated, depending on that context.

Following this, there is the position of *other men at the time of the violence, abuse and violation*, and *what happened in the immediate aftermath*, and before recording within #MeToo. As with what happens before violation, there is the question of the extent to which friends and family, and especially male friend and family members, are direct or indirect supporters at the time or shortly after the violence. Are there more open secrets, more collusions, simply more silences, at

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this point? There may also be more ambiguous responses, that combine condemnation of violence, yet implicit or explicit support for the perpetrator, within a broader nexus of men's homosocial support for men (Hearn 1998a). Men's own 'other' problems, such as depression, health, employment, marital, alcohol, may be foregrounded over the violence itself. To some extent, this is a gendered commentary on the extensive, but often not so gendered, research on the witnessing of violence, and the associated bystander effect: "in which witnesses fail to intervene in emergency situations, often because they assume someone else will take action" (Kettrey and Marx, 2018). Moreover, the desire of harassers or violators, mainly if not only men, and their allies and passive bystanders, to obscure and cover up may be inspired by simple power, shame or taken-for-grantedness. At the same time, this may be accompanied by the pressure on the violated, mainly women, and sometimes constrained decision-making, not to disclose violation. Is disclosing too risky or not worth mentioning?

Fourth, *what happened afterwards, specifically with the writings of #MeToo*. Allegations and accusations are made, perhaps for first time or not? Understandings of violations may change over time and vary by place, for at least some people.<sup>11</sup> The connectivity of reading others' writing may facilitate reframing reports made in relation to men's earlier actions – but also, in another sense, with a separation from men, not to be constructed by men and men's actions. Women likely do not want to make statements only or simply as a reaction or response to men. This is something difficult for some men to bear. As elsewhere, there is (almost) always a gap between feminism and men (Hearn, 1992b).

For men, or some men, the effects of accusation via #MeToo may be dramatic and immediate. Foteini Kreatsoula (2018: 4) suggests:

Perpetrators faced the consequences of their behavior, by being fired, suspended or forced to resign in various fields. Movie stars stepped out of the flattering studio light, to reveal details about their experience and risked losing their careers in front of the whole world, encouraging regular people to expose and be exposed, to share uncomfortable truths and face the stigma that always accompanies them, by challenging the norms of dealing with sexual harassment and abuse.

While this may be a somewhat positive overstatement for many, in terms of effects, it does capture the high intensity of the situation, for some. For others, nothing or very little may

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<sup>11</sup> The EU Report on *Bullying and Sexual Harassment* (Hoel and Vartia, 2018: 14) cites the 2017 YouGov survey of 8490 people in Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Norway and Sweden, that "explored how definitions and boundaries of what is considered sexual harassment differ from country to country, and found that Danes and Germans were least likely to consider an action as sexual harassment. People in Great Britain, France and Finland shared a broad idea of what constitutes sexual harassment". For example, a man telling a 'sex joke' was more likely seen as sexual harassment in Great Britain (69%), and a man putting his arm around a woman's waist was seen as sexual harassment more in France (72%) than elsewhere.

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happen, depending on the severity of the claim, whether anonymised or not, and the specific work, community and social power and power networks that the man concerned inhabits, that in some cases may make them less vulnerable or invulnerable.

One aspect of the aftermath is that the men mentioned, either by name or simply without name, may well not know of these statements by women – in distinction from when statements which are made public. At times, women's own statements may be anonymised, but may remain fairly easy to identify. Sometimes, the women may make statements publicly, but in an anonymised way regarding the alleged violator. So, one question is: do the men not know about what women say and write? Some men do not know, perhaps will never know. Another is: does that matter? And with what effects and what responses following?

So, some men may be openly accused and may be contrite, apologise, and try to change their behaviour, perhaps accepting, perhaps with the time lag, a reinterpretation of events, as an earlier normalisation of, for example, power abuse, sexual harassment, pressurised sex, sexual assault, or rape. When abuse is pointed out to men, some may consider themselves unfairly accused, simply deny or react not by asking how that could be, but by becoming victim, even fighting back, exerting revenge. Some may now fear more, with or without 'good reason', being accused or falsely accused. Women's speaking out may be followed by obstruction and abuse. The aftermath, even the cover-up, can be even more traumatic than the initial event. The targeting of women victim/survivors, and sometimes men, may occur twice (or thrice) over, in the event and the cover-up (as well as, sometimes, in legal proceedings).

Finally, there is the question of *what happens more broadly, not in relation to specific accusations*. As before, other men may be supporters or not. There are plenty of examples of men defending men in general, even as victims. In the wider picture #MeToo brings out broader antagonisms not only between women and men, but also between men and different political positionings of men. As such, men can also position themselves/ourselves for and against #MeToo as a generic phenomenon, regardless of the justice of individual claims or accusations. Anti-#MeToo-type statements from men abound on the manosphere (Ging, 2019), whether individual, homosocial or collective, overlapping with various anti-feminist movements and communities, such as incels. More positively, some groups and alliances of men moved quickly to advocate for #MeToo, as part of a broadly (pro)feminist politics (e.g. Global Secretariat Team, MenEngage, 2017 on #IPledge; Ruiz-Navarro, 2017).

Yet, caution needs to be exercised against the temptation of more progressive men to distance themselves from men perpetrators, sometimes as if there are two kinds of men: the 'good men' and the 'perpetrators' or the Ones and the Others. On the other hand, there are some men who routinely live my violence, and many who do not, so, at the same time, differentiation is accurate. Thus, engaging with the dangers of, on the hand, dissociation from men's violence, and, on the other, homogenisation, and perhaps essentialisation, of men in relation to violence is a necessary task. Negotiating the tensions between these poles, and acting on them positively, are part of (pro)feminism. For men doing anti-violence work, there are a series of challenges in addressing possible dissociation and distancing from, first, 'other men', second, men's violence, and, third, patriarchy more broadly (Burrell, 2019). These questions of differential relations to

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violence mirror debates on how political and policy work on anti-violence intervention also needs to be directed to non-violent men, not only men using violence (Pease, 2008). To put this another way, men's violence is partly maintained by the silence of non-violent men.

### ***Concluding comments: Change/ing men and masculinities***

Even if it not the motivating force behind #MeToo, one clear political interest of the movement is to *change men and masculinities – drastically*. This applies whether confronting the matter of simple misogyny, “extreme version of masculinity” (Solnit, 2017), different gendered (re)interpretations and re-evaluations of what was done, or even ambiguities in certain intimate or social-sexual relations, later recast by one or more of the parties.

Such variegations may also apply across generations – that is, without reifying generations. Boys and younger men are growing up with #MeToo – and also #GirlsToo – unlike older generations. In March 2018, the UK *Guardian* newspaper began the advice series ‘Dating after #MeToo: welcome to our newest advice column’,<sup>12</sup> which ran at least until mid-May that year. Both #MeToo and greater pornographisation of public/cyberspace are part of normal life for many, especially younger generations, along with the blurring of offline/online. Different generations are likely to be more or less familiar with these contradictions and the negotiations with them. Many younger people may be more ‘savvy’ than others when living daily in this environment. Dealing with the combination of wall-to-wall social media, internet-based abuse, widespread (wanted or unwanted) sexting, and sometimes ambiguous ‘hanging out’ and ‘dating’ can be very demanding for many, especially girls, young women and LGBTIQ+ people, and lead to major suffering for some (Ringrose et al., 2012, 2013; Hall and Hearn, 2017). Addressing such circumstances calls for creative interventions.<sup>13</sup>

But changing men and masculinities more broadly is very far from straightforward or linear, whether inspired by #MeToo or wider forces still. Changing men and masculinities does indeed demand drastic action not only by women, but also by men and boys, across all generations, across intersectionalities, individually, collectively, in private, in public, online, offline, and crucially across those binaries, and increasingly not only locally and societally, but also transsocietally, transnationally. Such action is needed against sexual harassment, violences and

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/mar/29/dating-after-metoo-advice-column>

<sup>13</sup> For example, in Finland, *Yksittäistapaus* [Isolated case] is a collectively created collection of short films, a feature film entitled *Force of Habit*, and a linked campaign, “that reveal the hidden way power is exercised on women in both private life and in society.” The project was begun late spring 2016, before #MeToo, by the film production company Tuffi Films and a group of fifteen film industry professionals, artists, researchers and social influencers to make short films “to give a physical form for “that thing”, the incidents that were regarded as a one-off but that were, in reality, caused by power structures and our unconscious operating models.” (<https://www.yksittaitapaus.fi/en/about-the-campaign-2/>).

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abuse to women, and to LGBTIQ+ people, children and young people, and other men, along with intersectional, anti-ageist, anti-classist, anti-(dis)ablist, and anti-racist action.

Key collective actors in changing men and masculinities, but not necessarily composed only of men include: MenEngage, a global alliance of many organisations and networks across several world-regions, Promundo, a Brazilian-originated non-governmental organisation, now also based in the US, working transnationally to engage men and boys in efforts towards gender equality and against sexual and gender-based violence, the South African-born NGO Sonke Gender Justice that works with men and boys across countries, the originally Canadian White Ribbon Campaign formed after the 1989 'École Polytechnique (or Montréal) massacre', and Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women. These organised initiatives still leave very much to be done in stopping violence across the whole range of social spheres and institutions in economy, polity and civil society.

Finally, furthering the aims of #MeToo also demands action to change men and masculinities against war and armed conflict, and in post-conflict times and places: matters that dominate in some parts of the world, often over a long time span.<sup>14</sup> It is not that interpersonal violences and violations are in one place, and war and armed conflict are 'somewhere else', in some 'other' place. Structural, collective and organised violences and violations also impact on interpersonal violences and violations, and are themselves often interpersonal. Moreover, post-conflict times and places, and 'return to peace', can also often remain dangerous, especially for women and girls. Indeed, various links have been made between violence against women and armed conflict (Beyer, 2014), control of women's bodies, 'honour cultures', and interpersonal violence (Brown et al., 2009), and hate crimes and terrorism (Mills et al., 2017; see Ekvall, 2019). Not surprisingly, women's well-being tends to link with societal peacefulness (Hudson et al., 2012).

Men and masculinities need to change for peace, gender equality; social equality and justice more generally. This is not possible with the presence and continuation of violence (Hearn et al., 2021). Some men work long and actively for positive peace (Ratele, 2012), personally and politically, in relation to (pro)feminism, gender equality, anti-racism or social justice, however framed. Even with the mass of men's violences and violations worldwide, men, masculinities and violence are not equivalents; men and masculinities are not deterministically violent.

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<sup>14</sup> In May 2020, The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Study, *Armed Conflict Survey 2020* (ACS), reported that 60 percent of the active armed conflicts across the globe have continued for over ten years (<https://www.iiss.org/press/2020/acs-2020>).

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