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Sharing dark truths, together

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Note: *While not graphic, this post talks about sexual assault, harassment and its aftermath.*

Earlier this summer a prominent man in my field lost his job after many young women at his workplace reported sexual harassment.

The news was harrowing, but suddenly countless women who have held a camera, spoken on air or typed a byline swapped stories, and not the fun kinds.

We remembered the time a man at an internship took a liking to us, not the work we produced. We remembered the man who always made us uncomfortable, but only now could we put our finger on why.

Some of it was the stuff of horror stories. Some of it would never make it past HR (because, like in court cases, factors like alcohol or a previous attraction make the outcome dicey). Each story, we were assured by others and assured each other, was equally valid.

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Then in recent weeks, the news cycle did the funny thing it does. News will break that one prominent celebrity was accused of sexual assault, and the world will go on after his scripted apology. He may even become a world leader.

News breaks that a man of equal celebrity faced the same accusations, and somehow it just won't die.

But I'm not tired of reading the outrage. And Sunday, the two words began flooding my social media feeds: "Me Too."

First it was to tell others how prominent assault and harassment really is. But in the absolute best way, it became more.

I posted my status, "Me too," with some words about how often those "uncomfortable" situations really occur. I wondered if it was too wordy. I wondered if it was too heavy (I'd already posted heavy stuff earlier this week; my friends surely thought I was a drama queen).

But a friend six hours away sent me a message of thanks: She wasn't yet comfortable with posting her own "me too." And that's OK.

Me, too.

If all the people who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote "Me, too." as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.

Another friend beat me to the post, adding how grateful she was to have had only one experience. By the end of the night, her flooded feed made her realize she actually had multiple experiences — she had just thought of it as everyday life, not harassment, she told me.

When men started posting their own “Me Too” statuses, my heart broke. But it shed light on a dark — and far too silent — topic.

In ninth grade, I was the snitch whose friends corroborated my story, then turned. They instead waited outside after school to beat me up and filled algebra class with taunts.

At 19, I didn’t yet realize how someone in power could take advantage of your willingness to learn your own field — and it took four years and some strong voices to stop blaming myself.

At 26, I learned that friends still don’t quite know how to react, when all you want is someone, anyone, to scream for you, “This is not OK, and by hurting my friend, you’ve lost all ties with me.”

Sunday night, I felt so much rage at this world, but watched people in troves speak to their own experiences, editing to include everyone and promising those who can't tell their story that they're heard, too.

With our voices, in messages and tweets and comments, we said all that we ever need to say: “I am so sorry you experienced that.” And, “Me too.”

I will tire of this subject when the excuse “the boys club,” is universally obsolete, frowned upon and just not acceptable.

I’ll stop the long rambles when we understand what actual harassment does: Freezes you in your tracks. Makes you blame yourself. Plays on repeat in your mind — and returns years later, at the most unexpected moment.

I’ll shut up when we stop blaming victims due to the irrelevant factors, and when we make it easier to hold the assailant accountable.

For now, I want to look that teenager in the eyes. I want to tell the girl whose boyfriend or husband wouldn’t relent until she gave in. I want to grab the hand of the person who went over for a drink, but now just feels cold:

“Me too.”

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