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Winter 2020

A Study of Women's Experience with Sexual Coercion and The #MeToo Movement

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Recommended Citation

Glos, B. R. (2020). A Study of Women's Experience with Sexual Coercion and The #MeToo Movement. Retrieved from <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/98>

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The #MeToo Movement first gained global attention in 2017 after the Twitter hashtag was first used to express support for the women accusing film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault (Burke, 2017; Garcia, 2017). The recent attention given to issues of sexual violence has not included women who report male perpetrated, coercive experiences that fall within the legal definition of rape, but who do not identify a perpetrators' actions as "rape" or "sexual assault" (Koss, 1985). This study sought to explore what, if any, influence the #MeToo Movement has had on women who have not acknowledged. This study recruited 13 women, ages 19 to 58, who did not identify a coercive sexual experience as "rape" or "sexual assault." This study was conducted via an online, open-ended narrative questionnaire. Thematic analysis and analysis of narratives were used to analyze participants' narrative data. Overall, three main themes were identified across participants' written responses. First, participants wrote that #MeToo helps women feel "less alone" and, in turn, challenges the isolation often imposed by rape culture. Additionally, participants reported that they experience uncertainty in how to label an unwanted and/or coercive sexual experience. Lastly, participants described changes to their understanding of an unwanted and/or coercive sexual experience. Results suggest that #MeToo has a positive impact for women who do not acknowledge and that these reported benefits do not require women to change their understanding of an unwanted and/or coercive sexual experience.