

Me too.

Over the last few weeks, these two simple words have launched an incredible campaign of solidarity across social media, as thousands upon thousands of women have come forward as having been the victims of sexual harassment or assault. The sheer number of testimonials, along with the terrible range of experiences which they describe, is staggering as is the fact that so many women are sharing their stories for the very first time, having long since buried them out of shame or fear or concern that they would not be believed. We have become so accustomed to various kinds of offensive behavior that they no longer seem to register. Or we recognize that the power dynamics inherent in this kind of objectification and violence leave women (and sometimes men too) exceedingly vulnerable to threats against their safety, their livelihood, and their reputation.

I consider myself one of the very lucky ones who has, fortunately, been spared from the most devastating forms of sexual predation. But like many women I have my stories, too, of inappropriate or aggressive treatment – from a high-school teacher, from a poorly chosen ex-boyfriend, in a professional setting some number of years ago. In writing this piece, I struggled over whether or not I should claim the MeToo hash-tag for myself. To do so seems to place my own experiences on par with others which are so very, very much worse. To not do so seems to indicate that the demeaning indignities with which almost all women at some point contend are somehow acceptable.

Along with the important awareness and consciousness-raising that the #MeToo campaign has ushered in, it has also brought no small amount of emotional pain to some, causing us to relive past traumas or learn heart-breaking things about people that we love, or feel a sense of despair at the enormity of this terrible problem. Some of us have stories that we don't feel comfortable sharing publicly. Some of us have come to difficult realizations about the ways in which we did (or didn't) act in past situations. Please know that my door is always open for those who wish to share or process or think together about how we might use the opportunity that this moment presents to create a safer and more respectful culture in our community and beyond. At a difficult time, we can support and listen to one another.

I am still not entirely sure if #MeToo applies exactly to me. But I am certain that sexual harassment and violence against women must stop and I am certain that (so-called) micro-aggressions against women must stop too, even if these two categories are of entirely different orders. I believe that good and decent people of all genders have an important role to play in creating the kind of culture shift that is necessary, not only listening carefully and compassionately when victims come forward but especially in confronting and challenging unacceptable behavior when we see it. As we read in Leviticus 19:16, "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is being shed." Judaism obligates us not only to do no harm but also to intervene when we see wrong being inflicted by others.

As the work-week ends and we turn towards sundown, I pray that this truly be a Shabbat Shalom – a Shabbat of peace for us all.

Rabbi Annie Tucker

