

# #NewWaytoSpeakUp

## Activism in the #Hashtag Era

*Ai-Ling Liao*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share what you know about hashtags. Read about them in the box below. What hashtags have you used?

Voting matters, but it takes place only once every few years. Fortunately, in between elections, we can use social media to express our opinions. What's even better, we have a little extra help from the "hashtag."

A hashtag allows people to share information and ideas about a common theme. They can build an online community, which can sometimes develop into a movement. #MeToo is a good recent example of how a hashtag can start small and then, over time, bring about a real change in the public discourse.

At first, a few survivors of sexual abuse courageously shared their stories on social media. They used the hashtag #MeToo. Soon millions of people added their voices. Before this wave of #MeToo messages, victims of sexual abuse were often blamed for what happened to them. People would say, "She must have wanted it," or "She was wearing provocative clothing." These kinds of assumptions are not fair to survivors of sexual abuse. The #MeToo movement helped uncover the magnitude of this serious problem in our society.

As a result of this #MeToo movement, there has been some progress in how our society responds. Take Nike corporation, for example. After the #MeToo movement, Nike sent out a survey asking female employees whether they had suffered sexual harassment at the company. According to the *New York Times*, this survey led to the resignation of several executives. Another example is the streaming radio company, Spotify. Spotify stopped promoting the pop star R. Kelly's music because of the allegations of sexual abuse against him. In France, the government made a law

against catcalling and other forms of public harassment.

This little tool, "the hashtag," changes individual struggles into collective ones and can "set off the cataclysmic transformations" in our society, argues Catharine MacKinnon. Using hashtag is a trending way to stand up and to be counted. We don't need to be celebrities to bring issues into the spotlight. We can stand up and speak up wherever we are and whenever we want. With a small fire of a post with the hashtag, the forest can be set aflame.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Explain the metaphor in Ai-Ling's last sentence. What evidence does she use to make the case that #MeToo became a powerful movement?

*Ai-Ling Liao is a student at the ESL class in Branford Adult Education. She recently moved to Branford from Taiwan and will stay in this beautiful shoreline area for a year during her husband's sabbatical at Yale University.*

**Sources:** Bennett, Jessica, "After #MeToo, the Ripple Effect," *The New York Times*, 28 June 2018, <[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)>; "Hashtag," *Wikipedia*, 2 Oct. 2019, <[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)>; MacKinnon, Catharine A., "Where #MeToo Came From, and Where It's Going," *The Atlantic*, 24 Mar. 2019, <[www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)>.



### What Is #Hashtag?

People who use social media can generate any hashtag they want. People around the world can search for messages and posts under the same hashtag and connect with people who care about the same subject.