

Word of the Year 2017 decided by English and Journalism Department—it's a tie!

#MeToo and Resist

In our monthly meeting in the first week of December, the Department of English and Journalism debated the merits of lexemes from *fake news* to [shitgibbon](#), and from [fatberg](#) to *thoughts and prayers*. As is our tradition for three years now, we consider words nominated over the course of the year by visitors to the Nancy Dickinson Writing Center. By the end, we had narrowed the field down to two: *#MeToo* and *Resist*. And perhaps it's appropriate that we honored the tie resulting from the final vote. The faculty was not aware that the Writing Center tutors had chosen *#MeToo* earlier that morning. Below is our justification for these choices.

On October 15, 2017, a topic that had mostly been kept silent or spoken of only in whispers came screaming across Twitter and Facebook feeds. “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted,” actor Alyssa Milano tweeted, “write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” By the next morning, reports *Time* magazine in its 2017 “Person of the Year” cover story, over 30,000 people had responded with *#MeToo*. In the following week, “versions of it swept through 85 countries, from India . . . to the Middle East, Asia, and all parts in between” (*Time*). In the wake of sexual harassment allegations against Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and the President of the United States, Donald Trump, “MeToo” began as a call for solidarity and continues with a resounding response, echoing loudly for its sheer numbers but also for the way it crosses lines of race, class, age, and gender. First used by African American social activist [Tarana Burke](#) over a decade ago to build “solidarity among young survivors of harassment and assault” (*Time*), *#MeToo* has picked up new momentum, and the towers of male power are crumbling under its force.

What has given this decade-old phrase new life? Some argue that it took being used by a white Hollywood actor to breathe life into it. And, to at least some degree, that may be true. If that's the case, the current wildfire of its use points not only to the oppression of women but also to the silencing of women of color. One could argue that no movement rises completely out of the ether; a movement always stands on the back of a rumble that came before it. Burke's *MeToo* surely stands on the thunder of Anita Hill, and *#MeToo* stands on Burke's tagline as well as the Women's March following the election of Donald Trump to the Oval Office. President Trump may well himself be credited with fanning the fire of the *#MeToo* movement. His *Access Hollywood* tape took language regarding sexual harassment and assault from euphemism to straight talk (*Time*).

Although some have argued that the finger pointing of this movement should be aimed at the male perpetrators rather than requiring the victims to self-identify, that 4.7 million people used the hashtag in 12 million posts during the first twenty-four hours following Milano's tweet (according to Wikipedia) suggests that *#MeToo* has given victimized women and men a voice for that particular part of their identity relegated to rumors, secrets, and silence. Grammatically, the phrase “me too” seems to be the object of the sentence “It has happened to me, too.” Eliminating the subject and letting the object stand alone—or speak for itself—makes clear the intent of both the hashtag and the movement. When the object of a criminal—or at the very least—oppressive

act is disentangled from the subject, we see that object more clearly. When the object is no longer reliant on the subject to have meaning, it becomes independent and significant itself. #MeToo erases the act (“*It* happened”) and the perpetrators (“*They* did it”) from the sentence, not to excuse the act or the perpetrator, but to let the object (“*Me* too) have an identity, a face, a voice. #MeToo gives the objectified a word with which to relay an entire narrative, a narrative that has for too long been the subtext. #MeToo is a clear demonstration that words are power.

Resist is of course an older lexeme that was infused with new meaning in 2017. In February of 2017, the [New York Times](#) defined it as “a one-word battle cry for the anti-Trump forces.” And [Mashable](#) rated #Resist the most popular activism hashtag of the year. And one could spend hours scrolling through the shopping results of a Google search for resist+shirt. You’ll find the [Smokey the Bear design](#), resist with a fist 👊, Sheppard Fairey knock-offs, and fusions with other slogans and images popular in the past year, including persist, nasty woman, the rainbow flag, and images of Colin Kaepernick.

We don’t regularly document the metrics of these words and symbols, but we are plugged in to social media, we listen to our students, and we care about the way words are used. No matter one’s political affiliation, the resistance to Trump’s policies, his words, and his past has been a significant factor in American culture in the last year. Even in a state that continues to support Trump more than most other states, we witness various forms of resistance on a near-daily basis, be it through [marches](#), t-shirts, student and colleague conversations, and a [growing interest in journalism](#).

Perhaps in a different year we wouldn’t feel comfortable with a tie. But 2017 was remarkable, a year historians will perhaps look back on as a watershed moment. And taken together, these two words—we feel—will reflect a time when a significant majority of Americans coalesced in a civic-minded and compassionate front and finally began to acknowledge the victims of widespread sexual abuse.