

The Unintended Consequences of #MeToo – Evidence from Research Collaborations

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Diversity and Inclusion in the Economics Profession: Progress and Pitfalls

Research Question

How did #MeToo impact collaboration between men and women?

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Yearly Δ in new projects post #MeToo of junior female economists



Decline in productivity largely due to fewer new collaborations with male coauthors

Motivation

- Collaboration is crucial for production of output
(Hamilton et al., 2003; Anderson & Richards-Shubik, 2021)
- Collaboration requires social interaction which has a cost
- Gender gap in career outcomes due to differences in collaborations & networks
(e.g., Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2019; Card et al., 2020; Ductor et al., 2021 ; Ductor et al., 2023)
- Events which change costs of collaboration particularly important for women

Motivation



#MeToo movement (Oct 15, 2017)

- Create awareness & expose culture where sexual harassment was tolerated
 - Encourage victims to come forward – offer public arena & support (e.g. name & shame)
 - Aim to enforce punishment of perpetrators
 - Increased reporting & detection (Levy & Mattsson, 2020; Gauthier, 2022)
- ⇒ Safer work environment for women by altering how women and men interact
- ⇒ Men are concerned about being accused of sexual harassment

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Open question:

Did #MeToo on net increase or decrease the costs of collaboration between women and men?

Contribution

#MeToo had unintended consequences that disadvantaged the career opportunities of the protected group

- First study to show evidence of negative impact of #MeToo on collaborations between men and women
- Exploit setting where collaborations are crucial but formed voluntarily to observe behavioral response to intervention
- Policy implications: design of clearer policies that govern social interactions in the workplace

Setting: Academia as a lab to observe change in collaborations

Challenge: Identify relevant interactions and measure impact on career-critical outcomes

Academic careers are dependent on collaborations and social interaction

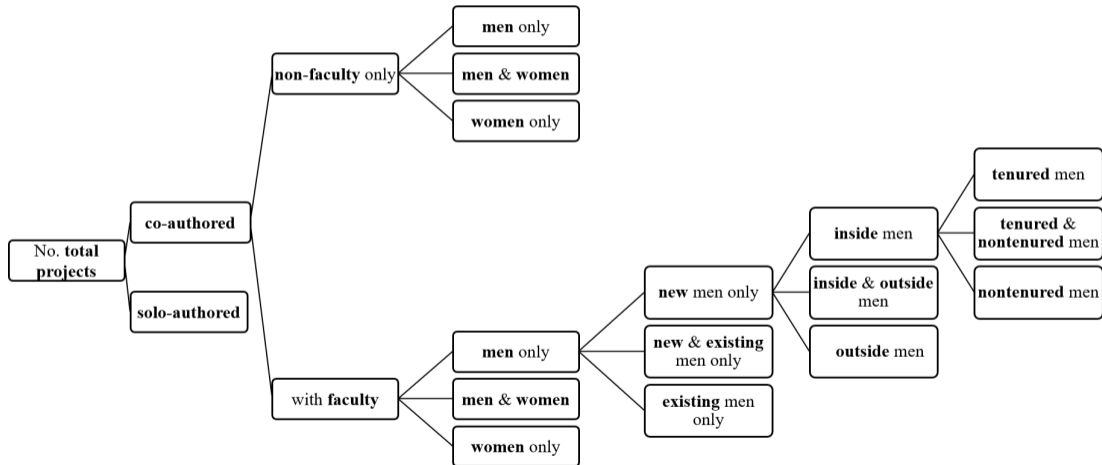
Research projects of junior academics:

- Relevant: pressure to produce research output to get tenure
- Collaborations are vital for productivity and success but are formed voluntarily
- Measurable: publicly disclosed and updated in vita
- Nature of interaction prone to ambiguous social situations: e.g. casual, longer-term
- Women underrepresented in economics

Empirical approach (1/3)

- Junior women (Ph.D. \geq 2014) on tenure-track in 2017 in top 100 U.S. economics departments (N=83)
- How did composition of collaborators on new projects of junior female economists change around #MeToo (2015-2020)?
- Event: #MeToo - projects as of 2018
- **New projects initiations:** Working papers and WIP on **historical CVs** + first appearance in seminar/conference

Empirical approach (2/3): Non-overlapping combinations of coauthors



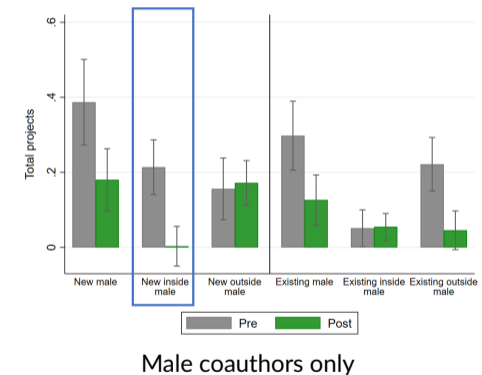
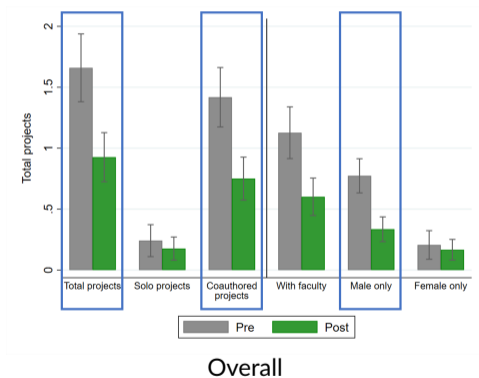
Empirical approach (3/3): Estimation

- **Outcome:** No. of collaborations of each type in year
- **Post:** As of 2018 - how did no. of each collaboration type change?
- **Same junior female academic at same institution** (person - university FEs)
- **Controls** (time-variant): No. years since tenure-track start, coauthor network, department composition
- **Robustness:** Collaborations of junior men, placebo test (2012-2017), research fields (JEL), COVID-19

$$N_{iu,t} = \alpha_{ct} + \beta_1 Post_t + \beta_2 A_{iu} + \beta_3 C_{iu,t} + \epsilon_{iu,t}$$

How did collaboration between men and women change around #MeToo?

Marginal effects: Collaborations of junior women before & after #MeToo



Women start fewer new projects post #MeToo - largely due to fewer collaborations with new male coauthors (at the same university)

Do men manage a perceived increased risk of sexual harassment accusations post #MeToo?

Specificity in university **sexual harassment policies** on behaviors subject to sanctions

- #MeToo increased public pressure for institutions to side with accusers
- Decisions about employment continuation made through internal investigations
- A higher perceived risk of sexual harassment accusations when:
 - **Sexual harassment policies** are not clear about which behaviors are a violation:
No. of examples of behaviors (pre-#MeToo)
 - The probability of reporting appears high (Cheng & Hsiaw, 2020):
Accumulated no. of public sexual harassment cases (pre-#MeToo)

Sexual harassment policies: less specific (broad) policy

Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature on or off campus, when: (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a condition of an individual's employment or academic standing; or (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions or for academic evaluation, grades, or advancement; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating or hostile academic or work environment. Sexual harassment may be found in a single episode, as well as in persistent behavior. All members of our community are protected from sexual harassment, and sexual harassment is prohibited regardless of the sex or gender of the harasser.

Sexual harassment policies: more specific (narrow) policy

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, such as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when:

Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or academic standing; or

Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for significant employment decisions (such as advancement, performance evaluation, or work schedule) or academic decisions (such as grading or letters of recommendation) affecting that individual; or

The conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive that a reasonable person would consider it intimidating, hostile or abusive and it adversely affects an individual's educational, work, or living environment.

A partial list of examples of conduct that might be deemed to constitute sexual harassment if sufficiently severe or pervasive include:

Examples of **verbal sexual harassment** may include **unwelcome conduct such as sexual flirtation, advances or propositions or requests for sexual activity or dates**; asking about someone else's sexual activities, fantasies, preferences, or history; **discussing one's own sexual activities, fantasies, preferences, or history**; verbal abuse of a sexual nature; suggestive comments; sexually explicit jokes; turning discussions at work or in the academic environment to sexual topics; and making offensive sounds such as wolf whistles.

Examples of **nonverbal sexual harassment** may include **unwelcome conduct such as displaying sexual objects, pictures or other images**; invading a person's personal body space, such as standing closer than appropriate or necessary or hovering; **displaying or wearing objects or items of clothing which express sexually offensive content**; making sexual gestures hands or body movements; looking at a person in a sexually suggestive or intimidating manner; or delivering unwanted letters, gifts, or other items of a sexual nature.

Do men manage a perceived increased risk of sexual harassment accusations post #MeToo?

Variables	No. of collaboration with new male coauthors at the same institution
Post	-0.053 (0.174)
Post x Log No. incidents (cum.)	-0.325* (0.167)
Post x Log No. behavior examples in policy	-0.052 (0.048)
Post x Log No. incidents (cum.) x Log No. behavior examples in policy	0.100** (0.046)
Time-variant controls and FEs	Yes
Observations	393
R-squared	0.275

When sexual harassment policies are ambiguous & the no. of public sexual harassment incidents is high - the decline in collaborations between men & women is larger

Conclusion & Implications

How did #MeToo impact collaboration between men and women?

- ⇒ Decline in productivity among junior female academics largely due to fewer new collaborations with male colleagues.
- ⇒ Consistent with men managing an increased perceived risk of sexual harassment accusations post #MeToo.
- Negative productivity effects for women need to be considered in promotion decisions.
- **Clear policies that outline appropriate workplace behavior are important.**

AEA P&P: Navigating Policy Specificity in Academia – The Evolution of Sexual Harassment (SH) Policies Around the #MeToo Movement

Organizations face a **trade-off** in setting **policy specificity** (Edelman, 1992):

- **Specific policies: clear rules for accepted behaviors and those subject to sanctions**

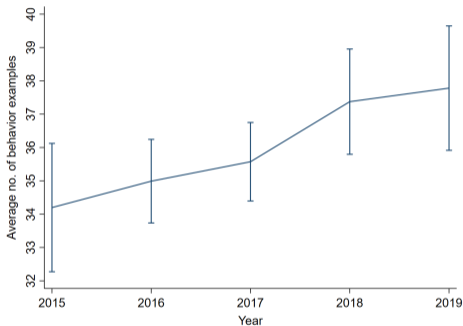
- **Benefit:** Clear guidance is important when employees can adopt unwanted behaviors (e.g., in communication, collaboration) to mitigate compliance risk.

- **Cost:** Less flexibility to accommodate new types of SH as they arise. Can reduce protection for women & create perception of inadequate handling by organizations.

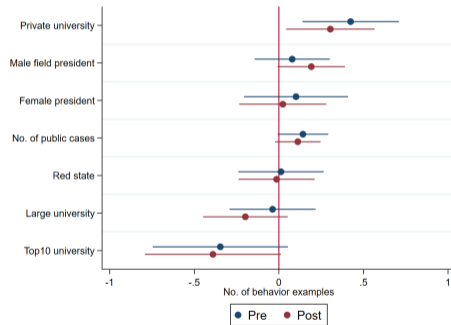
#MeToo offers chance to study strategic priorities. How did universities adapt policies?

⇒ **#MeToo:** pressure to address SH for organizations, threat of sanctions for accused, evolving norms around accepted workplace behavior

How did universities adapt specificity in sexual harassment policies around #MeToo (2015-2020, N=96)?



Evolution policy specificity (university fixed-effects, N=480)

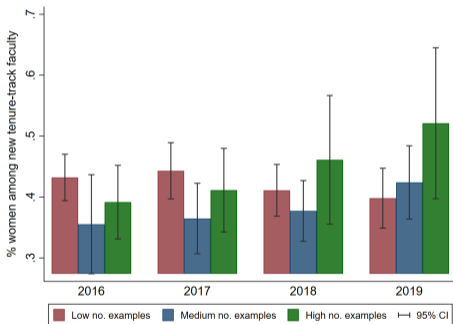


Drivers of policy specificity

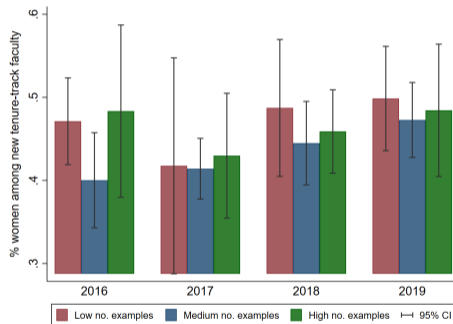
Policy specificity increased post #MeToo. It is higher in private universities, with more incidents, when presidents obtained degrees in male-dominated academic fields.

Real effects of policy specificity around #MeToo: Does it affect hiring of junior women?

Share of junior female hires by level of policy specificity:



Full professor composition is **more** male-dominated (top 40%)



Full professor composition is **less** male-dominated (bottom 40%)

Positive association between the hiring of junior women and policy specificity when decision maker are more male-dominated post #MeToo.

Conclusion & Implications

How did universities adapt specificity in sexual harassment policies around #MeToo?

First study to shed light on sexual harassment policies, the key legal framework to address workplace sexual harassment.

- Increasing specificity of sexual harassment policies post #MeToo.
- Suggestive evidence: more specific policies have a positive association with hiring of junior female faculty after #MeToo when decision-makers predominantly comprise men.

⇒ Potential interpretation:

Universities prioritize clearer guidance for behavior after #MeToo to reduce incentives for risk-mitigating behavior that could result in negative externalities (e.g., on work environment and collaboration).