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Dear Subscribers,

Happy new year!

We hope you all had nice holidays. To start off the year we propose a discussion on a complicated yet necessary topic: the recent #MetooEcon movement.

Ignited by actress Alyssa Milano's 2017 tweet, the #MeToo has become a synonym for the liberation of speech regarding sexual abuse and harassment. Over the years, a number of smaller-scale hashtags appeared, calling out specific industries: #metoopolitique, #metootheatre, #SciencesPorc, but with no similar movement in Economics. In November 2022, Jennifer Doleac's (Associate Professor of Economics at Texas A&M University) call for testimonials rekindled the #MeTooEcon and generated an unprecedented debate about gender discrimination and abuse in academia.

Academia's late reckoning

Contrary to the Weinstein case, **big headlines did not spontaneously cause academia's MeToo moment**. Early 2019, the accusations against the Harvard Professor in Economics Roland Fryer for *verbal and sexual harassment* of his staff at Harvard sparked a debate. The American Economic Association (AEA) committed to handle the issue, with a specific attention to the "grey zones", such as seminars and conferences. They do not fall under Title IX - Education Amendments of 1972-, which prevents sexual offenses between the members of the same university. The AEA *created a standing committee* in charge of "tak[ing] and permanently record[ing] complaints concerning harassment or discrimination in any professional context" ([Lowrey, 2022](#)), however *its power to impose sanctions remains very limited*. They conducted a survey which provided further grounds for concern, with only one woman out of five declaring to be satisfied with the current professional climate in the field. *The situation is especially bad for women of color*, as Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman pointed out: "It's sexual harassment on top of racial harassment" (idem). In France, most of *the focus* has been put on *student-on-student violence*, with incriminating articles against the country's top institutions: [Sciences Po](#), [Central Supélec](#), or the [HEC business school](#) to only cite a few, evidence regarding academia remains scarce.

The Fryer case however, did not trigger a #MetooEcon, neither did the news articles about systematic harassment within these schools. This is most likely due to the **specific power dynamics in academia** (see [Van Scherpenberg et. al \(2021\)](#) for instance), which make it very *difficult* for junior female researchers *to call out their aggressors*. Speaking up can come at a *high cost* in a field where reputation is key: how can young researchers come forward when publications, jobs and conference opportunities are all *reviewed by their peers*? Jennifer Doleac's action takes place in that very specific context. Her approach is somewhat new, as she did not speak up as a victim but rather *stood up to amplify other women's voices*, describing herself as a "switchboard operator" ([Bajkowski, 2022](#)). She collects stories, connects women

with similar experiences, and puts them in contact with journalists and attorneys.

Systemic issue, punctual responses ?

Looking at what happened after these denunciations, especially within academia: in the US, **small-scale initiatives have emerged to promote ethical behaviors have been implemented**, such as Laura Gee's "Don't Hire a Harasser" policy, which was signed by 6 universities. Misty Heggeness, Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, has succeeded in organizing a discussion on predatory behaviors at the next AEA annual meeting (year 2023). Targeting black women more specifically, the Sadie collective was founded in 2018 to *provide resources and increase their visibility* in the field. In contrast, French universities and professional organizations have *invested little effort* to look into the reality of the field, *despite extended media coverage* of sexual harassment and abuse in the country's top institutions. The momentum of the *MeToo* moment prompted academic institutions to *turn to exterior associations* to help create a safer work environment. Among them, the **CLASCHEs** student collective has been active since 2002 to support victims with information on legal procedures and access to medical care. Created more recently, the Egaé is an organization which works with universities (such as the Paris School of Economics) to *create awareness and collect testimonies*. Even though these collectives were not created as a response to *MeToo*, they became key actors of change in its aftermath, especially in the absence of a coordinated large-scale response.

Latest research findings...

Recent work by [Gertsberg \(2022\)](#) found a **significant and negative effect on the number of collaborations between women and men researchers**. She interpreted it as a response to the risk of sexual harassment accusations, finding a stronger effect in places where behavioral rules were unclear.

Using French survey and administrative data, [Batut, et al. \(2022\)](#), found that **women were more likely to quit their jobs and move to lower-risk firms** (where toxic behaviors, such as those that were targeted by MeToo, were less prevalent) after MeToo. The movement led then to what might be associated with a reckoning: toxic behaviors became less tolerable for women. This finding also suggests that women face a "double penalty" when working in environments with high rates of toxic behaviors, as they are not only more likely to be victims of such behaviors, but also feel pressured to leave their jobs in order to avoid them.

Also focusing on the French context, [Deruelle \(2022\)](#) focused on the **role of sexuality in scientific seminars and conferences**. After conducting semi-directive interviews with 24 members of the French national Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), she found that while heterosexual males perceived these events as liberating spaces where they could find opportunities both on a professional and personal level, female researchers found this permeability detrimental. More specifically, women have developed a range of strategies to avoid sexual harassment, which may lead them to miss out on career prospects.

Useful resources

- French government's [website against sexist and sexual abuse](#)
- CLASHES' [guidebook](#)
- Egaé's [website](#)

Recent academic opportunities

- Post-doctoral position on gender audits at the OFCE, under the supervision of H  l  ne P  ravier. More information [here](#).
- Call for Proposals from the CSWEP-SSRC Women in Economics Research Consortium on the evaluation of interventions aiming to increase women's success in the economics field. More information [here](#).

Find out more (newspapers & research articles)

- C. Batut, C. Coly, and S. Schneider-Strawczynski (2021) "It's a man's world: culture of abuse, #MeToo and worker flows", *Working paper available at PSE* (available [online](#))
- C. Bajkowski (2022) "On #EconTwitter, #MeToo anger is boiling over", *The 19th* (available [online](#))
- F. Deruelle (2022) "La sexualité en colloque, une « parenthèse enchantée » ? Violences et rituels professionnels à l'épreuve de l'égalité des carrières scientifiques", *Terrains et Travaux*, 40, 89-111 (available [online](#))
- M. Gertsberg (2022) "The Unintended Consequences of #MeToo: Evidence from Research Collaborations", *Working paper available at SSRN* (available [online](#))
- S. Le Nevé (2021) "Le modèle Sciences Po dans la tourmente avec les polémiques sur la « culture du viol » et l'« islamophobie »", *Le Monde* (available [online](#))
- S. Le Nevé (2021) "CentraleSupélec : ouverture d'une enquête après une étude montrant l'ampleur des violences sexistes et sexuelles", *Le Monde* (available [online](#))
- A. Lowrey (2022), "Harassment in Economics Doesn't Stay in Economics. When women in the profession face mistreatment, everyone suffers", *The Atlantic* (available [online](#))
- I. Rais (2021) "Humiliations sexuelles, homophobie, sexisme: voyage au sein des grandes écoles de commerce françaises", *Mediapart* (available [online](#))
- C. Van Scherpenberg, L. Bultema, A. Jahn, M. Löffler, V. Minneker and J. Lasser (2021) "Manifestations of power abuse in academia and how to prevent them", *Elephant in the lab* (available [online](#))



WEPS

Have a very nice week,

The WEPS team

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Women in Economics Paris and Saclay (WEPS) is an initiative dedicated to evaluate, reflect on and improve the place of women and gender minorities in Economics.

We do so by diffusing academic knowledge on gender imbalances, creating spaces to share experiences, and strengthening connections between women economists and economists from gender minorities.

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