

NOTES

FROM SPEAKING OUT TO PRIVATE REBELLION: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ADVOCACY IN THE #MeToo
AND 4B MOVEMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Despite having vastly different cultures and political landscapes, the United States and South Korea (hereinafter Korea) have experienced similar tensions between feminist and anti-feminist movements in recent years. The Trump administration has facilitated attacks on women’s freedoms that have existed for decades. Notably, the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution does not protect the right to abortion, overturning *Roe v. Wade*.¹ The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (“SAVE”) Act raised concerns among lawmakers that it would make it

* © 2026, Jillian Rayes.
1. *See* Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Org., 597 U.S. 215, 231 (2022).

difficult for married women whose surname no longer matches their birth certificate to vote.² On the other side of the world, recently-impeached Korean president Yoon Suk-Yeol blamed “feminism” for the country’s declining birth rate and dismissed concerns about gender inequality,³ as increasing rates of sexual assault and digital sex crimes threatened the safety of Korean women and girls.⁴

These attacks on women’s rights, while similar, have sparked drastically different responses from feminist groups in the two countries. In the United States, campaigns like the #MeToo Movement encourage women to share their experiences in efforts to normalize discussions of sexual abuse and increase the rate at which sex-based crimes are reported to the police. While the #MeToo Movement has mitigated the social stigma that has historically affected sexual assault survivors,⁵ some of the movement’s critics highlight its failures to adequately address the plight of women in minority communities.⁶

In Korea, on the other hand, silent protests have emerged as a strategy for change. Specifically, women are expressing protest by withdrawing from relationships with men due to the economic impracticalities of holding a job and caring for a family at the same time,⁷ as well as fears of male-perpetrated violence in intimate relationships.⁸ This growing trend of women distancing themselves from relationships with men resulted in the “4B” movement, which began in the online forum “Megalia.”⁹ The term “4B” comes from the Korean word *bi* (bi), which means “no”—referring to the four “no’s,” or the four things women in the movement should refrain from doing with men; *bihon* (no marriage), *bichulsan* (no childbirth), *biyeonae* (no dating), and *bisekseu* (no sex).¹⁰ Critics of the 4B

2. See, e.g., BRYAN STEIL, COMM. ON HOUSE ADMIN., H.R. REP. NO. 118-552, at 49 (2024) (minority views), <https://perma.cc/NV5F-8UA8>; Juliana Kim, *Will the SAVE Act make it harder for married women to vote? We ask legal experts*, NPR (Apr. 13, 2025), <https://perma.cc/P44W-GVT2>.

3. Brianna Zimmerman, *South Korea’s 4B Movement Lowers the Birth Rate in a Fight for Gender Equality*, INT’L AFFS. REV. (Aug. 8, 2023) (“President Yoon Suk Yeol used men’s frustrations surrounding [gender equality] as part of his political platform, blaming feminism for the low birth rate while simultaneously claiming that gender inequality is not an issue in South Korea.”), <https://perma.cc/A8SS-TAVX>.

4. Hyung-jin Kim, *In South Korea, deepfake porn wrecks women’s lives and deepens gender conflict*, AP NEWS (Oct. 3, 2024), <https://perma.cc/FE8F-JY2E>.

5. See Aya Gruber, *A Tale of Two Me Toos*, 2023 U. ILL. L. REV. 1675, 1677 (2023), <https://perma.cc/8ZQK-EJR8>; Kim Dinan, *Global ‘Me Too’ movement hits close to home*, MOUNTAIN XPRESS (Jan. 26, 2018) (“the stigma [attached to sexual assault] has been eroded to a certain extent”), <https://perma.cc/9MU3-YGVN>.

6. See Gruber, *supra* note 5 (critiquing the #MeToo Movement for its focus on the carceral system and policy reforms); Alicia Boyd & Bree McEwan, *Viral paradox: The intersection of “me too” and #MeToo*, 26(6) NEW MEDIA & SOC’Y 3454, 3454–55 (2024) (characterizing the #MeToo Movement’s “illusion of inclusivity” that simultaneously excluded the Black women who comprised the movement’s “original community”).

7. HAWON JUNG, *FLOWERS OF FIRE* 262–63 (BenBella Books 2023).

8. *Id.* at 129.

9. Euisol Jeong, *Troll Feminist: The Rise of Popular Feminism in South Korea* 6 (Sept. 2020) (Ph.D. dissertation, University of York) (on file with White Rose eTheses Online, Universities of Leeds, Sheffield, and York), <https://perma.cc/244V-A6GY>.

10. *Id.*

movement are concerned that it serves only to intensify gender-based conflicts, making men resent women for taking away their access to sex while simultaneously depriving women of basic pleasures.¹¹

For all of their differences, these movements have also converged as women across the world explore what strategies will best protect their rights. As the 2024 presidential election drew to a close, young women in the United States, primarily through platforms such as TikTok, learned about the 4B Movement and called for the movement to take root in the United States.¹² Similarly, the #MeToo Movement arrived in Korea in 2018, when women needed it most. With gender-based violence on the rise, Korean women took to the streets in protest, proudly proclaiming “[m]y life is not your porn” and “[a]ngry women will change the world.”¹³

In this paper, I will analyze the similarities and differences between the responses of the #MeToo Movement and the 4B Movement to their respective countries’ attacks on women’s rights. Section II will explore the cultural and historical contexts that created the breeding ground for movements like #MeToo and 4B. I will distinguish between the viral trend of #MeToo and its roots in the “Me Too” Movement founded a decade earlier by Tarana Burke. I will also explore the resurgence of feminism in Korea in 2015, spurred on by the growth of the internet as a forum for community conversations. In Section III, I will focus on similarities between the two movements, including their use of social media and the creation of feminist communities and support groups. Section IV will turn to the differences between #MeToo and 4B, highlighting how each movement uses either speaking out or silent protest and institutional change or grassroots activism to advance its vision for women’s rights. Section V will address the resurgence of antifeminist sentiments in the last decade in both the U.S. and Korea, highlighting how the same strategies that have given feminist movements a stronger voice have also allowed their opponents to feel comfortable publicly threatening the rights and safety of women.

II. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A. FOUNDATIONS OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT

When #MeToo surfaced on Twitter in 2017, it was like a dam broke from the pressure of a slew of high-profile cases of sexual assault. Stories of prominent male figures across the country harassing women began surfacing over a year before Alyssa Milano’s now-famous tweet. Lady Gaga spoke out at the Oscars in

11. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 74 (“The Megalian movement can be understood as an explosion of pent-up gendered conflicts in South Korea.”).

12. In response to the election of President Trump in 2024, a 24-year old American woman who had learned about the 4B Movement on the social media platform TikTok explained that “[i]t’s heartbreaking to know that in this country you only matter if you’re a straight white man [...] so I will not let another man touch me until I have my rights back.” Alaina Demopoulos, *‘No man will touch me until I have my rights back’: why is the 4B movement going viral after Trump’s win?*, THE GUARDIAN (Nov. 7, 2024), <https://perma.cc/K8Q4-FBAX>.

13. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 3.

2016 as a survivor of sexual violence.¹⁴ Later that same year, Taylor Swift won a high-profile lawsuit after the man she accused of groping her at a meet and greet sued her for defamation.¹⁵ As the 2016 presidential race neared its close, the now-infamous Access Hollywood tape was released, in which then-presidential candidate Trump can be heard discussing “grabbing [women] by the pussy.”¹⁶

The country also watched on as Brock Turner went on trial for raping Chanel Miller on the Stanford University campus in 2015. Miller’s statement at Turner’s trial—“you don’t know me, but you’ve been inside me, and that’s why we’re here today”—was read eighteen million times online, received an open letter in response from then-Vice President Joe Biden, and was read into the Congressional Record by Representative Jackie Speier.¹⁷ Turner would ultimately serve only three months for a conviction on three counts of felony sexual assault, with the sentencing judge citing concerns over Turner’s “future” and “the pain Turner might suffer during incarceration” as reasons for the light sentence.¹⁸

By 2017 and 2018, the public’s attention started to turn to Hollywood as Bill Cosby went to trial for the assault of Andrea Constand. Constand was just one of the dozens of women Cosby was accused of drugging and raping over decades. In his testimony at trial, Cosby argued his assault of Constand was consensual because she had not tried to stop him from raping her, despite him openly admitting that he drugged her without her knowledge.¹⁹ Cosby was found guilty and sentenced to three to ten years in prison, but in 2021, his conviction was overturned by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for a violation of Cosby’s due process rights tied to a non-prosecution agreement struck with a previous prosecutor.²⁰

With all of this media attention directed toward attacks on women occurring within such a small timeframe, the release of accusations against Harvey Weinstein was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back.²¹ News of the accusations first broke when the *New York Times* ran an article titled “Harvey

14. See LEIGH GILMORE, *THE #MeToo EFFECT: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE BELIEVE WOMEN* 32 (Columbia Univ. Press 2023).

15. *Id.* at 32–33; see also *Mueller v. Swift*, No. 15–CV–1974–WJM–KLM, 2017 WL 2362137 (D. Colo. May 31, 2017).

16. GILMORE, *supra* note 14, at 39–41; Camille Gibson, Shannon Davenport, Tina Fowler, Colette B. Harris, Melanie Prudhomme, Serita Whiting, & Sherri Simmons-Horton, *Understanding the 2017 “Me Too” Movement’s Timing*, 43 HUMAN. & SOC’Y 217, 221 (2019).

17. GILMORE, *supra* note 14, at 33–34.

18. *Id.* at 33–39.

19. *Id.* at 38; Gibson, Davenport, Fowler, Harris, Prudhomme, Whiting, & Simmons-Horton, *supra* note 16, at 222.

20. Graham Bowley, Sydney Ember, Matt Stevens, Lauren McCarthy, & Maira Garcia, *Bill Cosby: Actor Freed After Sexual Assault Conviction Is Overturned*, N.Y. TIMES (May 5, 2025), <https://perma.cc/M7NZ-6CZP>.

21. GILMORE, *supra* note 14, at 52 (Highlighting “two key patterns in Weinstein’s behavior. The first was the sexual abuse of women who worked for, or sought work from, him. . . the second pattern was the cover-up of this abuse waged through a network of employees and enablers”).

Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.”²² In the months that followed, over one hundred women alleged that they had been sexually assaulted or raped by Weinstein, often lured in under the guise of life-changing meetings that would launch the young actresses’ careers. Weinstein managed to silence the allegations for decades by issuing millions of dollars in settlement payments and pressuring survivors into signing NDAs.²³

Within days of the allegations against Weinstein becoming public, actress Alyssa Milano took to Twitter, writing, “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me Too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.”²⁴ Within twenty-four hours, #MeToo was used 109,451 times on Twitter, and the hashtag eventually amassed over 12 million uses on Facebook alone.²⁵

Milano’s tweet in October 2017 may have introduced the idea of #MeToo to the world, but the movement had been around for a decade before she used the term. In 2006, Tarana Burke began the “Me Too” Movement as a means of community for Black female and minority survivors of sexual violence.²⁶ Her goal was “‘empowerment through empathy’ – to not only show the world how widespread and pervasive sexual violence is, but also to let other survivors know they are not alone.”²⁷ As a survivor of sexual violence, Burke noticed the failure of the system to help those like her and felt compelled to change it;²⁸ a particularly formative experience for Burke involved an encounter she had with a twelve-year-old girl named Heaven, whom she felt she had failed, because she “didn’t see [her] story as [her] gift, only as [her] shame,” thus preventing her from telling Heaven the all-important words, “it happened to [me] too.”²⁹

While Milano was not aware of Burke’s “Me Too” at the time she posted her hashtag on Twitter, her movement still co-opted what was originally a safe space for minorities and women of color who had survived sexual abuse.³⁰ Burke is noticeably absent from the cover of *TIME Magazine*’s “Person of the Year: The Silence Breakers” issue, which purported to represent “the voices who launched [the #MeToo] movement.”³¹ In reality, the *TIME* cover only represented the

22. Jodi Kantor & Megan Twohey, *Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 5, 2017), <https://perma.cc/L7G2-6XVT>.

23. GILMORE, *supra* note 14, at 52–59.

24. *Id.* at 49.

25. Brianna I. Wiens, *Virtual Dwelling*, in NETWORKED FEMINISMS: ACTIVIST ASSEMBLIES AND DIGITAL PRACTICES 85, 87 (Lexington Books 2021).

26. Tarana Burke, *To Measure a Movement*, TIME, Oct. 24, 2022, at 48.

27. TARANA BURKE, UNBOUND: MY STORY OF LIBERATION AND THE BIRTH OF THE ME TOO MOVEMENT 8 (Flat Iron Books, 2021).

28. *Id.* at 154–57, 248.

29. *Id.* (“For Heaven, and Diamond, and Kaia, and little Tarana, and all the little colored girls who don’t have any other option but to live, learn, love, and try to thrive in the places where they were harmed.”).

30. See Dinan, *supra* note 5.

31. Stephanie Zacharek, Eliana Dockterman, & Haley Sweetland Edwards, *Person of the Year 2017: The Silence Breakers*, TIME (Dec. 18, 2017), <https://perma.cc/YTG2-UKDS>.

celebrity voices that launched a movement; that is, the voices that could draw the most traffic and, as a result, the most revenue to *TIME*'s platform. The stories of famous white women like Milano, while horrific tragedies, are often the most palatable for members of the general public, who are used to seeing these women in the spotlight and dissecting every detail of their personal lives. The presence of a strong fanbase can also lower the stakes of opening up about such a deeply personal story by providing emotional support and going to bat against online "trolls" who may seek to tear female survivors down. What began as an opportunity to empower minorities essentially became a force led by cis, white celebrities that failed to recognize that "the stakes [are] higher" for women of color who speak out against their abusers.³² This difference in stakes meant that Milano's movement also had noticeably different goals from Burke's original conception of "Me Too." When Burke initially saw the viral hashtag on Twitter, she expressed concerns about "inviting people to open up and share their experience with sexual violence online without a way to help them process it," as this could "lead to emotional crisis in the absence of caring, empathetic environments."³³

At the same time, many saw the #MeToo Movement as a significant step towards decreasing the stigma associated with surviving and reporting sexual assault. In the months after the movement went viral, some sexual assault help centers saw a nearly 50 percent increase in people accessing their services, and over 22 million dollars were raised to support women from low-income communities who sought justice through the legal system.³⁴ In Korea, a country whose #MeToo movement is seen as "one of the most successful in Asia and beyond," women began to speak out against their abusers, leading to a raise in the age of sexual consent from 13 to 16, new laws designed to combat workplace sexual harassment and digital sex crimes, and a vow by the prosecutor's office to stop pursuing false-allegation suits brought against survivors of sexual assault.³⁵

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT LEADING TO THE 4B MOVEMENT IN SOUTH KOREA

The fight for women's rights in Korea approached a boiling point in 2015, before #MeToo reached the nation's shores, marking a resurgence from a previous lapse in the country's feminist movement. During the 1970s and 1980s, feminists generally aligned themselves with the broader democracy movement, in the hopes that the nationalist agenda included women in its vision of the future.³⁶ They were sorely disappointed when the democracy movement sidelined women's issues in favor of

32. BURKE, *supra* note 27, at 243.

33. *Id.* at 4.

34. See Dinan, *supra* note 5. See also Christal Stanley, Confronting Sexual Harassment of Women: Examining Best Practices to Provide Hope 8 (June 2022) (Psy.D. dissertation, Azusa Pacific University School of Behavioral and Applied Sciences) (ProQuest).

35. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 5, 90, 212–13.

36. Anat Schwartz, *Acceptable Activism: The History of the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement and the Contemporary #MeToo Protests in South Korea*, in *THE OTHER #METOOS* 1, 7 (Iqra Shagufta Cheema ed., Oxford University Press 2024), <https://perma.cc/FH2V-6F9L>.

other priorities that were not considered “gender-specific.”³⁷ Dissatisfied with the perceived failures of their mothers and grandmothers, the turn of the century in Korea saw feminism “floating about” as if it were “a commodity out of fashion.”³⁸ Instead, young women were “far too busy surviving on their own” and turned to the “newer and easier” way of life offered by consumer capitalism.³⁹ However, a series of events beginning in 2015 would reignite the feminist movement and start a fierce gender war between young men and women.

In February of 2015, Korean women began their own Twitter campaign with the hashtag “#iamafeminist,” meant to reclaim the term amid a rise in antifeminist discourse online.⁴⁰ Then, in August, a rumor spread online blaming two women for an outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (“MERS”) after they took an international flight to China, despite knowing they were exposed to the disease.⁴¹ This rumor was later proven to be false, but not before men used the incident to vilify women at large.⁴² Determined to fight back, young, internet-savvy women infiltrated the traditionally male online communities that were bashing women, such as DCinside and Ilbe.⁴³ These women began “mirroring” the behavior of so-called “women-haters” online. “Mirroring” consisted of taking common phrases used by misogynists, such as “*kimchinyeo* [a selfish, vain woman]” or “*bojeonkkae* [I will break a bulb in your cunt]” and flipping them to “*kimchinam* [an ugly, sexist man]” or “*hujeonkkae* [I will break a bulb in your asshole]” to irritate antifeminists by throwing their offensive language back at them.⁴⁴ Eventually, women migrated to a website created specifically for so-called “man-hating” feminists to gather away from men, called “Megalia.”⁴⁵ The Megalia website would quickly disintegrate, and many of its members would migrate to a platform titled “Womad,” in part to avoid prosecution by the police for their radical commentary, and in part after the Megalian community fractured over attacks on members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the forum.⁴⁶ The terms “Megalia” and “Womad” remain synonymous with extreme radical feminism in Korea.

Empowered by these online communities, Korean women transformed online activism into offline progress. In 2016, after a woman was brutally murdered in a

37. *Id.* See also JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 105 (“Perhaps inevitably, the ‘democratic’ future envisioned by leading male activists had few places for women that weren’t simply the home.”).

38. Haejoang Cho, *Feminist Intervention in the Rise of “Asian” Discourse*, 3 ASIAN J. OF WOMEN’S STUD. 127 (Young-rae Um trans., 1997).

39. *Id.*

40. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 83–84.

41. Joo Hyun Cho (조주현), *Nonjaeng Jungin Hanguge Yosongundong: Jolryakjijok Haengdongjangnirongwa Silchonnirone Gwanjjomeso* (논쟁 중인 한국의 여성운동: 전략적 행동장이론과 실천이론의 관점에서) [*The Contentiousness of Korean Women’s Movement: From the Perspectives of Strategic Action Fields Theory and Practice Theory*], 123 GYONGJEWASAHWE (경제와 사회) [ECON. & SOC’Y] 110, 111 (2019) (S. Kor.) [hereinafter *Contentiousness of Korean Women’s Movement*].

42. *Id.*

43. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 137–47.

44. *Id.* at 7, 88, 142–43.

45. *Id.* at 86.

46. *Id.* at 98–99, 116.

public bathroom by a man she had never met, purely because “he felt ‘snubbed by women,’” thousands posted messages on sticky notes at the entrance to the Gangnam subway station in protest.⁴⁷ These women rallied behind the recognition that “she was killed because she was a woman. . . and we [as women] accidentally survived.”⁴⁸ A year later, Prosecutor Seo Ji-Hyun launched #MeToo into the spotlight by publicly accusing her superior of groping her at a funeral for a colleague’s father and using his power to keep her quiet.⁴⁹ Others quickly followed suit, leading to investigations into prominent men such as the poet Ko Eun, director Lee Youn-Taek, and politician Ahn Hee-Jung.⁵⁰ As a result, Ko Eun’s poems were removed from school textbooks and an exhibition in his honor was dismantled.⁵¹ Lee Youn-Taek was convicted of twenty counts of sexual assault and sentenced to seven years in prison.⁵² Ahn Hee-Jung was initially acquitted on all counts due to a lack of evidence that his assistant had not consented, but on appeal, he was convicted on nine counts of sexual harassment and coercion and sentenced to three and a half years in prison.⁵³

At the same time, women were still fighting against high rates of sexual harassment, digital sex crimes, and the police’s failure to hold perpetrators accountable. In 2018, over 300,000 women gathered over five days to protest the pervasive use of spy cams to film and share videos of women without their consent, a practice known as *molka* in Korea.⁵⁴ One year later, the 2019 sex trafficking and assault conspiracy known as the Burning Sun scandal broke in the news.⁵⁵ A group chat comprised of high-profile male K-pop idols was revealed to have been sending each other videos of themselves drugging and raping unconscious women.⁵⁶ Discovery of the group chat led to further revelations that a club known as “Burning Sun,” owned by a member of the K-pop group Big Bang, Seungri, had been drugging unsuspecting clubgoers so they could be raped by high-profile clients and investors.⁵⁷ Members of the group chat at the center of the scandal received varying sentences, from eighteen months to six years in prison.⁵⁸ From

47. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 131.

48. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 148–49.

49. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 12, 25–26, 34 (“I came here today to tell all the victims of sexual assaults out there that . . . it is not your fault. Never. It took me eight years to realize that. . . . But I realized that nothing changes as long as the victim remains silent.”).

50. *Id.* at 39–41.

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.*

53. Yoonjung Seo, *Disgraced South Korean governor jailed for sexual assault*, CNN (Feb. 1, 2019), <https://perma.cc/2GBM-CS7F>.

54. Hyunback Chung, *South Korean Women’s Movement: Between Modernisation and Globalisation*, in ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF EAST ASIAN GENDER STUDIES 59, 70 (Jieyu Liu & Junko Yamashita eds., 2019); Justin McCurry & Nemo Kim, ‘A part of daily life’: South Korea confronts its voyeurism epidemic, THE GUARDIAN (July 3, 2018), <https://perma.cc/FGD7-ULRZ>.

55. BBC WORLD SERV., *Burning Sun: Exposing the secret K-pop chat groups*, at 12:34 (YouTube, May 18, 2024), <https://perma.cc/45XR-8M9T>.

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.* at 23:27.

58. *Id.* at 54:10.

2018 to 2020, an online “sextortion” case was taking place using the online messaging platform Telegram.⁵⁹ Known as the “Nth Room” case, Cho Ju-Bin (online username *Baksa*, or “Doctor”) and Moon Hyung-Wook (“GodGod”) stole private information from over 100 women and girls and used it to blackmail them into recording sexual videos, which they shared with over 260,000 followers in online chatrooms.⁶⁰ The arrest and conviction of Cho and Moon in 2020, resulting in sentences of forty-two years and thirty-four years in prison, respectively, was a landmark for sex crimes in a country that generally assumed holding men accountable for sexual abuse was impossible.⁶¹

Survivors of these sex crimes are often left with virtually no avenue for justice, as Korea’s police do not view sexual harassment as a serious crime and, even if a perpetrator is arrested, their punishment is likely to be extremely light, if they get punished at all.⁶² Even if the police took women seriously, Korea’s laws allow people to be sued for defamation even if their statements are factual.⁶³ Perpetrators of sex crimes abuse this law to keep their victims quiet by threatening traumatic and financially draining lawsuits against women who report their crimes.⁶⁴ The Korea Gender Violence Crisis Center reported around 150 retaliatory lawsuits and criminal accusations against survivors it helped between 2018 and 2019. Notably, aforementioned poet Ko Eun sued the woman he assaulted for libel and sought 1 billion Korean won (\$761,000) in damages.⁶⁵

The 4B Movement came to be in the context of these abuses. While there is no official origin for the 4B Movement, it is generally believed to have surfaced on Megalia as women searched for a space where they could “bond with one another to survive in this world without feeling isolated.”⁶⁶ 4B is often called a “movement,” but it is more of an “inevitable” consequence of the realities of life as a

59. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 200–13.

60. Hyewon Kang, Hae Won Kim, Giyeon Baek, & Dongsook Park, *Recalling the Past Within a Social Network’s Collective Memory Work: How Did Korean Twitter Users Shape #Equal_Punishment_for_Equal_Crime_From_Their_Experiences?*, 9 SOC. MEDIA SOC’Y 1, 3 (2023). “Cho eventually forged a pool of more than seventy ‘slaves’ by making fake, lucrative job offers to those desperate for money, asking them to send basic personal information and revealing photos. Then he and his colleagues blackmailed them by using their personal details as well as their families’, obtained through a teammate who worked at a government office and had access to state databases.” JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 204.

61. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 213.

62. *Id.* at 179–82 (“From 2015 to 2020, prosecutors dismissed over six out of ten spycam cases [...] more than 60 percent of those who stood trial for such abuse from 2014 to 2018 only received a fine, mostly less than \$2,700. [...] [O]nly 6% of those convicted ended up in jail”).

63. See generally Hae-Sung Yoon (윤해성), *Songpongnyok Pihaesasilgwa Sasiljjokssi Myongyehwaesonjwee Jogyong Munje* (성폭력 피해사실과 사실적시 명예훼손죄의 적용 문제) [*The issue of the application of the factual libel charge to sexual violence victims*], 13(1) IHWAJENDOPPOPAK (이화젠더법학) [EHWA J. GENDER & L.] 179, 180 (May 2021) (S. Kor.) (discussing how current defamation provisions in South Korea allow perpetrators of sexual assault to suppress disclosure of their crimes) [hereinafter *Factual Libel Law*].

64. *Id.*

65. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 77.

66. Jeong, *supra* note 9, 261–63; see also JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 270.

woman in modern Korean society.⁶⁷ In addition to widespread sexual violence, the importance of Confucianism in Korean society has led to rigid gender norms that expect women to take primary responsibility for household labor.⁶⁸ This belief is so ingrained in society that many corporations are reluctant to hire young, highly educated women, out of concern that they will quit in a few years to raise a family.⁶⁹ The devaluing of female labor in Korea has also produced the largest gender pay gap recorded by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (“OECD”) every year since 1996.⁷⁰ Korean women have grown exhausted with conforming to a system that no longer works and are ready to reckon with what it might mean to “lose men” and recenter themselves as the focus of their lives.⁷¹

III. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN #MeToo AND 4B

Despite originating from incredibly different, culturally specific contexts, #MeToo and 4B share similarities in their organization and advocacy approaches. These similarities are indicative of how social movements have adapted as the landscape of technology and digital mediums of communication develop rapidly. On the other hand, the similarities between #MeToo and 4B are not necessarily all positive. Both movements have received similar criticisms from their supporters about where they have fallen short, suggesting a broader need for women’s movements to shift their approaches to particular issues facing their communities.

A. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEDIUM FOR INCITING CHANGE

Advances in technology since the early 2000s have opened a myriad of avenues by which activists can share ideas and create community among like-minded individuals. At its start in 2006, Tarana Burke’s “Me Too” Movement was using MySpace to spread awareness among survivors of sexual violence in communities of color and increase their access to resources to help them cope in the aftermath of trauma.⁷² In Korea, the development of “internet cafes”—online forums such as Daum, DCinside, and Megalia—formed communities where people could congregate to discuss particular issues, as well as their thoughts, feelings, and plans for offline activism.⁷³ Technology was essential to the success of #MeToo

67. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 272; *see also* Raphael Rashid, *As 4B takes the world by storm, South Korea is grappling with a backlash against feminism*, THE GUARDIAN (Nov. 15, 2024), <https://perma.cc/ZQ33-Y5ML> (“Like me, most of my female friends are more focused on their careers than dating right now, but that’s not because of 4B, it’s just the reality of being a young professional in Korea.”).

68. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 263 (“Married women are expected to take far greater, if not the entire, responsibility for domestic duties . . . South Korean men spend forty-nine minutes a day on such unpaid work. . . South Korean women spend 215 minutes per day on such work. Even in double income families, men still spend less than a third of the three hours their wives spend on such labor every day.”).

69. *Id.* at 35–36.

70. *Id.* at 4.

71. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 263 (“Dating expenses, adorning oneself, standing at the side of misogynist male stars, these things are all linked to heterosexual desire. So, I think they’re all linked to [the desire of] not losing men.”).

72. *See* BURKE, *supra* note 27, at 235.

73. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 101–02.

and 4B, allowing their organizers to reach larger audiences and adapt to changing circumstances rapidly.

A benefit of social media is its ability to spread messages to large audiences at little to no cost. “Me Too” may have existed in another form before 2017, but the movement likely would never have gained such widespread attention if not for Alyssa Milano’s recognition of Twitter as a powerful tool to gather women nationwide in one space. Her tweet created an “indicator” which acted as a concrete representation of the “magnitude” of the U.S.’s sexual harassment problem.⁷⁴ Critics of the movement, like Aya Gruber, have attacked this method of polling the public as imperfect due to the ease with which celebrity figureheads can generate a response and because it does little to contextualize the issues it claims to represent.⁷⁵ While these concerns are valid, they ignore the fact that online noise and en masse responses to calls for change are an important place to start. It is easy for naysayers to see individual cases of harassment and shrug them off as a one-time occurrence, allowing the cycle of ignoring women to go on and on. However arbitrary such trends on social media may be, they provide a pathway towards more substantive, constructive change. Milano made the scale of the issue undeniable.

As posts online gain momentum, the number of responses can also serve as a safety blanket for women who otherwise would have been afraid to speak out. In the wake of #MeToo, resource centers in both the U.S. and Korea saw increased rates of women reporting their attackers or reaching out for resources to help them navigate trauma.⁷⁶ Those who shared their stories through social media without making a report expressed relief simply because they finally spoke their stories into the universe.⁷⁷ Participants in 4B and the closely-related #EscapeTheCorset Movement, which aims to dismantle Korea’s rigid beauty standards, intentionally posted photos of themselves on Instagram to be used as living proof that the movement made a difference, hoping it would encourage other women to join them.⁷⁸ They plastered their profiles with photos of themselves cutting their hair short, destroying their makeup products, and doing activities that are traditionally done by couples on their own or with other women.⁷⁹ As more and more women join in, the more feasible a life without men or the “dress-up labor” of intense beauty routines seems to become.⁸⁰

74. Gruber, *supra* note 5, at 1684.

75. *Id.* at 1685 (“Little skepticism was directed toward the tweet’s measuring methods or the fact that famous people can produce whatever indicator they want.”).

76. Dinan, *supra* note 5 (“Our VOICE has seen a 50 percent increase in clients accessing its services.”).

77. See, e.g., Jane Kelly, *#MeToo: Why the Social Media Campaign Has Taken Hold*, UVATODAY (Nov. 20, 2017), <https://perma.cc/U9YB-JTPU> (“As to the #MeToo campaign, [i]t’s good for the person who is telling it because it is cathartic.”).

78. See Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 241–43.

79. *Id.*

80. Gwoon Jung, Yaquan Liang, & Hyunsook Lee, “*I feel free and comfortable*”: *The Escape the Corset Movement in South Korea and the question of women’s agency*, 107 WOMEN’S STUD. INT’L F. 1, 3 (2024).

Social media is also more equipped to respond to changes in a movement in real time. If newspapers and essays in law journals were the only way to spread stories of sexual harassment, it would take weeks or months for them to garner the attention received under #MeToo. When Korea's antifeminist former-president Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law in 2024, it would have been impossible for feminist groups to organize as quickly as they did to demand his impeachment.⁸¹ People are so used to having a constant stream of information coming from their phones that even social movements must offer some form of instant gratification for people to remain engaged.

While instant access to vast amounts of knowledge can be fantastic, it can also be dangerous. As people grow more concerned about the speed at which information is uploaded to Twitter or TikTok, they spend less time focusing on the strength and accuracy of their arguments.⁸² 4B offers an example: as the movement gained attention in the U.S. after Donald Trump's reelection, American women portrayed the movement as a "sex strike" designed to get back at men for threatening women's rights.⁸³ Americans ignored the cultural background and failed to acknowledge that Korean women were doing far more than trying to stick it to men. Then, just as fast as the movement surfaced on TikTok, it faded into the background when a newer and more interesting trend came along.⁸⁴

In many ways, women's digital activism in the past decade has been the blueprint for other movements, proving that using social media to garner support from the public *works*. In the wake of #MeToo, other movements in the U.S. followed strikingly similar strategies on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms, such as the #BlackLivesMatter Movement in response to the killing of George Floyd by police in 2020.⁸⁵ This trend towards online activism in both the U.S. and Korea indicates that the younger generation is taking the lead in fighting for the future they want to experience. Young adults have grown up in a society where technology is pervasive and attention spans are waning, but they are also the most informed generation when it comes to algorithms and creating noise in digital spaces.⁸⁶ Social media has become a powerful force and will continue to be a pivotal battleground for activist movements, and, as such, future leaders must remain cognizant of the successes and failures of movements like #MeToo and 4B and continue to grow from the foundation they have built.

81. Ahlem Faraoun, *South Korean Women's Resistance at the Heart of Yoon Suk-yeol's Impeachment*, THE DIPLOMAT (Dec. 31, 2024), <https://perma.cc/6NYD-UMPV>.

82. See generally *Contentiousness of Korean Women's Movement*, *supra* note 41.

83. Finn Mackay, *Sex strikes' aren't the feminist win they appear to be. Here's how to get really radical*, THE GUARDIAN (Dec. 31, 2024), <https://perma.cc/XLD8-KRY2>.

84. Arwa Mahdawi, *Sex-positive feminism had its moment – and now it has been replaced by voluntary celibacy*, THE GUARDIAN (May 21, 2024), <https://perma.cc/YR8A-53U6>.

85. See Wiens, *supra* note 25, at 86, 89.

86. See Ki-young Shin, *Beyond #WithYou: The New Generation of Feminists and the #MeToo Movement in South Korea*, 17 POL. & GENDER 507, 510 (2021); JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 120 ("We were experts of the language that'd been hurled at us for all our lives").

B. CREATING SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR LIKE-MINDED WOMEN

In the eyes of many women, the most significant achievements of both the #MeToo Movement and 4B are the support groups and community networks they created for women to congregate safely. These groups go far beyond merely giving women the confidence to share their stories online by offering support to survivors as they testify against their attackers, organizing meet-ups to navigate trauma collectively, and creating community groups focused on fighting loneliness among single women.

Oftentimes, testifying at trial is just as traumatic for a survivor of assault or harassment as the initial attack. Courtrooms are filled with male perpetrators, their friends, and (usually) male judges who inadvertently undermine survivors by using arbitrary measures to question the veracity of their testimony.⁸⁷ In an effort to uplift one another and prevent retraumatization, survivors have taken it upon themselves to fill courtrooms with other women to make survivors feel supported and signal to the judges and prosecutors that they will be held accountable for their actions. Tarana Burke sat in on the testimony of Christine Blasey Ford during the Supreme Court confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh, where she accused him of sexually assaulting her years prior.⁸⁸ When another woman in attendance questioned Ford's inability to remember more details of the assault, Burke spoke up, reminding the lady that "[w]e are lucky that she is able to recall anything at all, and if all we have to do is take in the words that took her three decades to pull from the pit of her stomach, to the back of her throat, and push them out of her mouth—then we should all feel privileged to do just that without judgment or complaint."⁸⁹

In Korea, where the judicial system's track record for punishing male perpetrators is abysmal,⁹⁰ women like "Witch," a survivor of sexual assault herself,⁹¹ have begun coaching other women on how to ensure the police and judges are receptive to their stories.⁹² Witch also sits in on these testimonies, both out of solidarity and as a means of researching to help other women in the future better advocate for themselves.⁹³ Added support from women who have experienced similar trauma empowers survivors as they face their attackers. By reminding women they are not alone, the chances of survivors going through with testifying against perpetrators increase, leading to more accountability and more women's stories being taken seriously.

87. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 90.

88. See generally Burke, *supra* note 26.

89. *Id.* at 50.

90. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 74 ("Less than 30 percent of rape reports made to women's hotlines across the country have a chance to qualify as rape. Of those that reach prosecutors, nearly half of sexual assault cases are dismissed—a far higher percentage than for other major crimes like robbery (18 percent) or homicide (19 percent).").

91. The woman mentioned adopted the pseudonym "Witch" to protect herself after her accusations against her abuser led to a four-year legal battle and numerous attacks from men in online forums. The moniker is inspired by the very words that men online used to insult her. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 79–80.

92. *Id.* at 81–84.

93. *Id.*

Witch also leads sessions to empower survivors and remind them that their assault does not define them. In one such session, women wrote their fears and traumatic memories on dolls made of straw before chopping the dolls into pieces and burning them, signifying their release from the experiences the dolls represented.⁹⁴ Creating communities for survivors to heal and move forward was also the primary goal of Burke's version of "Me Too." When she first started "Me Too," the program was part of a broader movement teaching young black girls about their culture, leadership, and self-worth.⁹⁵ Stigmatization surrounding abuse can destroy women's valuation of themselves. Rarely are they told that assault is not their fault and, often, that is the thing they need to hear the most. These communities of similarly situated women are incredibly comforting and empowering. The social system is not set up to provide adequate support for survivors' physical and emotional needs. Women are learning to fill in the gaps and remind each other they are not alone.

Women who follow the principles of 4B in Korea have taken the meaning of community a step further, moving beyond sexual assault to help each other combat loneliness in a society that views single women as social outcasts. The patriarchy plays such a prominent role in the lives of Korean women that the system essentially forgot to make space for those who choose not to follow the standard life path. For example, many restaurants in Korea require each table to order enough food for at least two people or they will refuse to serve you, leaving single women feeling isolated and stranded.⁹⁶ Groups like "Elite without Marriage, I am going Forward" ("EMIF") and the Eunpyeong Sisters have started constructing women-only communities to combat the growing loneliness epidemic.⁹⁷ These groups organize regular outings for single women who live in the same neighborhoods, allowing them to dine together at restaurants that would not seat them if they were alone, share hobbies like knitting or watching movies, and teach each other traditionally male skills to encourage self-sufficiency.⁹⁸ These communities are combating the belief that living as a single woman means being destined to live a life of misery. Their ability to find fulfillment in new ways begs the question of why men are seen as so essential to a happy life in the first place.

Community groups created from #MeToo and 4B have also taken great leaps towards disproving some of the most common criticisms the movements receive from other feminists. Feminists who are against these movements' strategies for activism argue that #MeToo and 4B center men in spaces that are supposed to be about uplifting and liberating women.⁹⁹ The 4B Movement is also harshly criticized for its radical approach to activism; many question why women must

94. *Id.* at 85–89.

95. BURKE, *supra* note 27, at 207–09.

96. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 274.

97. *See, e.g., id.*

98. *See id.* at 258–59, 270–79.

99. Heather Wilhelm, *The Sexes After Weinstein*, NAT'L REV. (Dec. 31, 2017), <https://perma.cc/8GJT-PS3A> ("[W]aiting for a man to save you—a man who is likely self-interested in his career, with little to no interest in calling out a powerful news anchor, either—seems a bit patriarchal, no?").

give up inherent pleasures like sex or dressing femininely to be treated as equal to men.¹⁰⁰ However, these critiques fall short in the face of female-centered communities finding alternative ways to fulfill parts of life without needing male partners. By their nature, women-only communities center women in their activism rather than men. While other parts of #MeToo and 4B may focus on punishing male perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault or encouraging men to alter their perceptions of women to achieve long-term change, female communities focus less on changing others and more on caring for women.

Female isolation is something that women don't have to wait for the government to solve for them, hoping one day it will get the attention it deserves. It is women who are helping other women to heal, women who are supporting other women as they testify in court, and women who are going out with other women to combat loneliness. These communities give women back the pieces of their lives they once thought would be taken away by either the presence or absence of a male partner.¹⁰¹

IV. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN #MeToo AND 4B

Although #MeToo and 4B share strategic similarities in their approaches to advocacy, their activism is also vastly different. These differences are informed by the cultural and historical backgrounds that shape the boundaries within which activists must operate. The #MeToo Movement developed in the context of over 200 years of fighting for women's rights in the United States. Each victory was a part of a long, hard-fought battle—from the suffrage movement leading to the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 to the sex wars half a century later opening the floor for conversations about the policing and hyper-sexualization of women's bodies.¹⁰² On the other hand, activism in Korea needed to develop rapidly in the aftermath of Japanese colonialism. The fight for women's rights often occurred in a pressure cooker alongside efforts to end a dictatorship, war with North Korea, and economic instability such as the 1997 IMF financial crisis.¹⁰³ During the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s, Korea opened its first hotline for survivors of domestic abuse, the Korea Women's Hot Line. In the aftermath of the dictatorship of Chun Doo-Hwan and the phaseout of military rule in the 1990s, the National Assembly defined various acts of sexual violence and domestic abuse as criminal offenses for the first time in the nation's history.¹⁰⁴

100. Mackay, *supra* note 83.

101. See Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 263.

102. LORNA N. BRACEWELL, *WHY WE LOST THE SEX WARS: SEXUAL FREEDOM IN THE #MeToo ERA* 5-6 (Univ. of Minn. Press, 2021) (discussing the clash at Barnard College in 1982 between advocates for female autonomy and anti-pornography activists).

103. See Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 29 ("Korean society experienced 'compressed modernity': compressive development that achieved modernised aspects in a comparatively short period of time compared to other societies"); see also Chung, *supra* note 54, at 60; Schwartz, *supra* note 36, at 6.

104. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 103, 106–08.

Informed by these factors, #MeToo and 4B diverge on some crucial points. Where #MeToo loudly voiced the stories of survivors of sexual assault and harassment so they could not be ignored, 4B took a quieter approach focused on small, individual acts of women. #MeToo also became incredibly intertwined with prominent American institutions and political actors, while 4B concentrates on grassroots advocacy. While these different approaches have all reached some level of success, they have also all been criticized for their shortcomings. To this end, perhaps it is time for women in the U.S. and Korea to take a page out of each other's playbooks, or maybe create a new playbook altogether.

A. #MeToo's STRATEGY OF SPEAKING OUT VS. 4B's USE OF SILENT PROTEST

The goal of #MeToo was primarily to "break[] silence and speak[] trauma."¹⁰⁵ Leaders of the movement hoped that vocalizing women's stories would "give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."¹⁰⁶ A deeper understanding of the issue's scope would lead to a deeper willingness to take action and make change a reality. To this end, women in the U.S. and worldwide shared their stories online, with those close to them, and even on Capitol Hill. The combined voices of millions of women were loud and unignorable. Many people changed their actions in response to the movement, and federal and state governments enacted new laws to prevent or punish gender-based violence in the future.

Common sense tells us that this is the most logical way to get something you want; how can a problem be fixed if no one says there is a problem in the first place? It is also an incredibly American view to take to the streets and raise your voice when you are unsatisfied with how you are treated, as our deep affinity for the First Amendment has instilled a love of speaking our minds into our hearts. However, the idea that activism is as simple as hopping online and posting a tweet is an idealized version of reality. Publicly criticizing the social norm is highly risky and can cause backlash that not everyone can handle. Many women who spoke out during #MeToo were threatened and harassed by others online who disagreed with the movement, which can be highly distressing and may lead to additional trauma for sexual assault survivors.¹⁰⁷ Women who raise allegations against their boss, a friend, or a family member are putting their livelihood and personal relationships at stake and may face retaliation. For example, a 2020 report found that 72 percent of women who reported workplace sexual harassment were fired, sued for defamation, or denied promotions.¹⁰⁸ As Burke notes, these stakes are even higher for women of color, as employers and the judicial system are much more sympathetic to "white women's tears."¹⁰⁹ A Brandeis University study

105. Judy Joo-Ae Bae, *Transforming the Unsaid into Action in Kim Jiyoung*, Born 1982, 93 UNIV. TORONTO Q. 23, 24 (2024), <https://perma.cc/J7QJ-EABS>.

106. Gruber, *supra* note 5, at 1684.

107. *Id.* at 1679, 1720.

108. *Seventy-two Percent of Workers Who Experienced Sex Harassment Faced Retaliation, Says New Report by NWLC Based on TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund Data*, NAT'L WOMEN'S L. CTR. (Oct. 15, 2020), <https://perma.cc/648W-MZ6U>.

109. Gruber, *supra* note 5, at 1715.

found that prosecutors file charges in 75% of cases where the survivor is a white woman.¹¹⁰ In contrast, the same study found that charges were filed in only 34% of cases where the survivor was a black woman.¹¹¹ Even if a woman of color's case is taken seriously, perpetrators of crimes against women of color receive notably lighter penalties compared to those who sexually assault white women.¹¹²

In this sense, women like Gruber and Burke are reasonably skeptical about how helpful or productive such vocal online movements can be. The benefits derived from making one's voice heard and demanding change in response may be outweighed by the additional burden placed upon women. These movements will never occur in a perfect bubble without backlash or hardship, and it seems facially unfair to ask the women at the forefront of advocacy to suffer for the benefit of other women's futures. The idea that this is the only way to reach the end goal of many feminist movements begs the question of why women must give up part of themselves or put themselves in harm's way to be deserving of the same rights as men to begin with. Once we adopt this line of thought, the question becomes whether there exists an effective way of inciting change that does not put feminists' lives at risk.

It is precisely this question of stakes that has led many Korean women to choose what some would consider a more passive, silent form of protest through the 4B Movement.¹¹³ Many Korean women are unwilling to bear the risk of speaking publicly about their experiences with sexual harassment, opting instead for a "safe break-up" with men as a whole.¹¹⁴ The Korean women who do speak up against their abusers are attacked viciously online and in the media.¹¹⁵ When K-pop idol Goo Ha-ra accused her boyfriend of secretly filming intimate videos of her to use as revenge porn, she was attacked incessantly for months, until she eventually took her own life.¹¹⁶ Many women who choose to speak up do so under aliases and cover their faces or change their clothes to prevent being attacked and doxxed by antifeminists.¹¹⁷ Under such threats to their safety and well-being, it is no surprise that women would turn to quieter forms of advocacy.

It is also important to note that 4B's silent protest is about much more than sexual harassment. Korean women are fighting against intense odds, with salaries almost a third less than male colleagues, pervasive gender-based violence and digital sex crimes, and rigid gender roles that have not changed despite the cost of

110. Angela Onwuachi-Willig, *What About #UsToo?: The Invisibility of Race in the #MeToo Movement*, 128 Yale L. J. F. 105, 107 n.11 (2018), <https://perma.cc/JPS3-X29H>.

111. *Id.*

112. *Id.*

113. See generally Bae, *supra* note 103.

114. Yeon-Hwa Gong (공연화), *Yosong Gyegeubeurobutoe Talpi Monikeu Witigeu Ironeuro Ingneun Hanguge Pobi Undong* ('여성' 계급으로부터의 탈피: 모니크 위티게 이론으로 읽는 한국의 4B 운동) [*Escaping from Class of 'Women': Reading 4B Movement from Korea with Theories of Monique Wittig*], 32 JENDOWA SAHWE (젠더와 사회) [GENDER & SOC'Y] 39, 58 (2021) (S. Kor.) [hereinafter *Escaping "Women"*].

115. See JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 303–10.

116. *Id.* at 198.

117. *Id.* at 49.

living making the single-income family model that relied on a housewife impossible.¹¹⁸ Indeed, many women who could be considered followers of 4B did not actively choose to participate in a protest. Before the term “4B” was even coined, women were foregoing relationships with men merely because they were too impractical to maintain. Women are exhausted from trying to meet rigid, unattainable standards.

In this sense, the “presence of non-speech” becomes as powerful a social tool for inciting change as women screaming at the top of their lungs for equality.¹¹⁹ As the absence of things men took for granted grows with each woman who refuses to adhere to patriarchal norms, the labor women have been quietly contributing for years becomes more noticeable. This is most commonly discussed in terms of Korea’s birthrate. *Bichulsan*, or “no childbirth,” is one of the main principles of 4B. By 2009, Korea’s birthrate fell to 1.1, far below the necessary 2.1 replacement rate, and in 2020 it dropped to 0.84, causing the country’s population to shrink for the first time, ten years earlier than anticipated, due to a death rate that exceeded the number of reported births.¹²⁰ There was no collective proclamation, no protests through the streets of Seoul where women vowed to destroy the country’s birth rate. Yet, the birth rate continues to fall as women silently choose to focus on their careers and personal safety over getting married and having children. The declining birth rate has left the government in a panic, scrambling to solve the problem of an aging population, and signifying that women’s quiet refusal to comply is *working*. Enough women made an individual choice to step away from their social duties that they made the government beg them to return to the social order.

Speaking out and opting for silent protest both come with risks and rewards. While vocal advocacy has allowed #MeToo to make significant progress by directly demanding what women want and need, it also risks putting many women in danger of retaliation. 4B, on the other hand, moves silently; its progress may not be as readily noticeable, but it focuses on the needs and abilities of individual women based on their life circumstances and avoids direct threats of harm. This difference in style is deeply rooted in each country’s cultural and historical context, suggesting that women prioritize certain advantages or disadvantages based on their knowledge of how they can expect others in their society to react.

However, it is doubtful that either strategy alone will be sufficient to create and sustain long-term change. Many American women would benefit greatly from learning to be comfortable with “losing men” and embracing silent protest. The lower risks associated with silent protest would lessen fears surrounding the persistent backlash against feminism. At the same time, Korean women may see increased results from balancing silent protest with more outspoken demands to be listened to. Korea’s feminist movement made significant progress towards equality in the wake of #MeToo, highlighting the need to engage in at least some

118. See generally *id.*

119. Bae, *supra* note 103, at 26–27, 30.

120. See JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 245, 259.

vocal activism alongside changes in women's day-to-day lives. While cultural and historical context may have influenced the choices made by advocates thus far, over time, the "best" advocacy strategy may change in response to an ever-evolving social and political landscape.

B. INSTITUTIONAL POWERS' INFLUENCE OVER #MeToo VS. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF 4B THROUGH GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

#MeToo and 4B also parted ways on the issue of whether to use institutional activism or a more grassroots approach to advocating for change. Major institutions can provide significant advantages to the advocacy groups they align with through increased funding, a prominent platform to boost their ideas, and the ability to sway policies to provide legal protection for the movement's interests. On the other hand, grassroots movements are more in touch with their supporters and more closely reflect the ideals of their communities because they don't need to consider the interests of political affiliates. By the time the #MeToo Movement's momentum died down, it had closely aligned itself with institutional powers. In contrast, the 4B Movement has remained a loosely organized grassroots movement.

When #MeToo first appeared online, it was primarily a grassroots movement to bring awareness to survivors of sexual assault and harassment. However, as time went on, the movement's name and ideas were co-opted by institutions, which used #MeToo's notoriety to take down men in prominent positions and drive through legislation that penalizes perpetrators of sex and gender-based crimes. #MeToo was closely aligned with the #TimesUp Movement that quickly followed in its stead, which was supposed to use donations to provide legal aid to underprivileged and underrepresented female survivors of sex crimes.¹²¹ In reality, #TimesUp used funding to increase the carceral state and cover up sexual harassment allegations levied against its board members and those with whom they were closely aligned.¹²² Legislators across the country also slapped the #MeToo name on new regulations that lengthened the statute of limitations for sexual harassment cases and increased the severity of punishment for perpetrators.¹²³

Gruber and others have been incredibly critical of carceral feminism and how it has become a major part of #MeToo's legacy.¹²⁴ She emphasizes how increases in the carceral state are often misleading, as they give the impression that something is being done to help solve the problem, but do very little to help the communities most affected by sex and gender based violence.¹²⁵ Indeed, in the aftermath of #MeToo,

121. See Gruber, *supra* note 5, at 1720.

122. *Id.* at 1720–22.

123. *Id.* at 1682, 1725–26 ("There is a collective amnesia that #MeToo's carceral call was once so passionate that supporters decried the presumption of innocence as a boon to rapists and reveled in accused men's 'civic death,' if not actual death.").

124. See generally Gruber, *supra* note 5.

125. *Id.* at 1677 ("[W]e suffer from an overabundance of #MeToo adulation . . . when analysts avoid critically scrutinizing #MeToo like other historical moments and simply reiterate its revolutionary status, we cannot know the range of #MeToo's lessons.").

none of the bills addressing sexual harassment introduced in state legislatures incorporated the words “intersectional,” “intersectionality,” “immigrant(s),” or “women of color.”¹²⁶ The seven years that have passed since #MeToo began have failed to produce a valid solution to these concerns.

At the same time, while women like Burke do not support carceral feminism, they recognize the sense of closure and healing that legal justice can give to survivors, and dismantling the system in the way Gruber suggests would deprive some survivors of avenues to unpack and deal with their trauma.¹²⁷ For this reason, while the carceral state could certainly stand to be scaled back, we also must be willing to “meet[] victims where they are;”¹²⁸ public institutions and the judicial system provide important enforcement mechanisms that serve as a lifeline for many who feel they have nowhere else to turn.

The 4B Movement takes the opposite approach, focusing on how women can make day-to-day changes to improve their quality of life. This focus on personal action, isolated from lobbying institutions, is a common thread through recent feminist movements in Korea. A mistrust of institutions has grown among the younger generation after seeing how institutional alignment failed their parents and grandparents in the 1970s and 80s.¹²⁹ The ignoring of women’s issues for decades by the institutions that claimed to have their best interests at heart, combined with a string of supposedly-feminist men who lead these institutions sexually assaulting their female colleagues, has left the younger generation feeling jaded about these groups’ abilities to accomplish what they have promised.¹³⁰ There are still women fighting for large-scale change in the government, but such groups mainly consist of older women or those who have left the Megalian Movement after fallout over the extreme nature of the group’s radical approach to feminism.¹³¹ Such aversion to institutional alignment suggests that feminists in the U.S., like Gruber, who encourage American women to scale back their reliance on such organizations, are onto something regarding the broader philosophy of efficient and effective advocacy. If there is clear and convincing evidence that institutions are failing or leaving women’s issues behind in pursuit of other goals, it is time to find a different path forward.

The result has been initiatives like #EscapeTheCorset and 4B, which use online forums to encourage women to reexamine how society treats them and take steps in

126. Jamillah Bowman Williams, *Maximizing #MeToo: Intersectionality & the Movement*, 62 BOS. COLL. L. REV. 1797, 1852 (2021).

127. Gruber, *supra* note 5, at 1714.

128. *Id.*

129. *See* Cho, *supra* note 38.

130. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 215 (“NGO activists just follow the method [of doing activism] their seniors used and passed on to them. . . . But these Megal-originated ones defend, offend, find ways and discuss them with each other, really fast, as they train themselves through the piled-up experiences. There’s no way for the people in NGOs to understand this”); JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 305–06 (describing Park Won-Soon, mayor of Seoul and “outspoken” feminist lawyer who represented the victim in Korea’s first workplace sexual harassment trial, who took his own life the day after his aide reported him for sexual harassment).

131. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 105–06, 120, 228.

their personal lives to break free from the roles imposed upon them.¹³² This approach is more desirable for some because it adapts to women's needs in the moment, rather than waiting on long institutional processes to fulfill their empty promises. There is, however, some concern that movements like 4B are too disorganized to make an impact.¹³³ Since the movement has no official leader or central authority people can turn to for guidance, women are often left to their own devices, and the movement has grown and splintered based on relatively minor differences of opinion.¹³⁴ Some groups have expanded the movement as far as 6B, adding *bisobi* (non-consumption) and *bidopbi* (supporting other women).¹³⁵ A lack of cohesion leaves people questioning the movement's end goal and may undermine efforts to rally large groups for in-person protests and initiatives.¹³⁶

Women's movements in both the U.S. and South Korea have embraced a combination of institutionalization and grassroots movements, suggesting neither strategy alone can effectively meet the current needs and future aspirations of feminist communities.¹³⁷ However, the growing mistrust of institutions among young Korean feminists and increased demands in the U.S. to lessen the use of the carceral state call into question whether institutional feminism is helping women at all. The long, drawn-out processes to make progress in institutions that often have ulterior motives and push women's issues to the side to focus on other priorities have become unappealing in an age where everyone is moving quickly and expects instant gratification for their actions. As many women turn towards grassroots movements that feel more aligned with their interests, the question remains whether these movements have the financial power and enough central organization to induce effective, long-term change for women.

V. ANTIFEMINIST RESPONSES TO WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE U.S. AND SOUTH KOREA

As much as #MeToo and 4B signify a societal shift towards more support for women's rights, recent years have also seen a rise in antifeminist sentiments that threaten to undermine progress made by feminist advocates. The same systems that have given women a platform on which to share their stories have also provided a breeding ground for misogynists to speak out¹³⁸ and feel safer about publicly threatening violence against those they view as enemies. The U.S. and Korea have both experienced this trend in their social movements and government policies.

132. *Id.* at 255, 261.

133. *Contentiousness of Korean Women's Movement*, *supra* note 41, at 130.

134. Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 98.

135. *Escaping "Women," supra* note 114, at 62–63.

136. *See generally* Jeong, *supra* note 9, at 105–06, 120, 228, 255, 261.

137. *See generally* JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 305–06.

138. Heather Hensman Kettrey & Summer Quinn, *Are Men Victims of #MeToo?*, SPSP (Jan. 15, 2025), <https://perma.cc/C6DE-HGMR> (“To MRAs, the fact that women’s collective stories of sexual assault are heard in a #MeToo era represents a threat to men’s relative power in society. In reaction to this threat, they cast themselves as victims who deserve reparations to restore the traditional gendered power structure—all in the supposed pursuit of fairness and equity.”).

A. ANTIFEMINIST BACKLASH IN THE WAKE OF #MeToo

In the U.S., women's rights are under fire from all directions; from "alpha male" social media influencers to the judicial system reevaluating long-standing protections for women to President Trump's election to a second term despite direct attacks on women, the LGBTQIA+ community, and racial minorities. These attacks suggest that, while the #MeToo Movement raised awareness and support for survivors of sexual assault and harassment, it also brought the issue to the forefront in the minds of those who feel threatened by women's increased social power.

Just as #MeToo brought millions of women together by using social media as a platform to reach a broader audience, male celebrities and influencers feel emboldened to speak their minds against women online. Influencer Andrew Tate, who is now under investigation for sex trafficking, is the face of the "Alpha Male" trend on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.¹³⁹ His videos espouse hypermasculine ideals of the man as the dominant partner in relationships and sex as something men have a right to demand from women.¹⁴⁰ The popularity of his videos led other men to emulate his style, and, after President Trump was re-elected, these men felt emboldened by the knowledge that the administration shares their ideals. Within hours of Trump's re-election, influencers like Nick Fuentes, Aidan Ross, and Jake Paul had taken to Twitter and other platforms, spewing phrases like "your body, my choice" at women who expressed fear over what the future held for their rights.¹⁴¹

Indeed, whose body and whose choice are questions that have been at the forefront of many Americans' minds since 2022, when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in its 6-3 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, effectively denying women the constitutional right to have an abortion.¹⁴² President Trump also had a hand in making *Dobbs* a reality, appointing three of the Supreme Court justices who voted to overturn *Roe* during his first term as president.¹⁴³ The Court's opinion in *Dobbs* has left many women in fear of what the current makeup of the Court could mean for other pivotal precedents that have protected the rights of women and minorities for decades, fearing that *Obergefell v. Hodges*, *Loving v. Virginia*, and *Griswold v. Connecticut* may be next on the chopping block.¹⁴⁴ While some of these fears were allayed in November of 2025 when the court refused to hear a case challenging its decision in *Obergefell*, the fight is not over yet.¹⁴⁵ The rights of trans youth are already on the line. In June of 2025, the Court in *United*

139. Chris Stokel-Walker, *How 'alpha male' influencers are radicalising our teen boys*, DAILY TELEGRAPH (Jan. 28, 2023), <https://perma.cc/H74X-8WLE>.

140. *Id.*

141. Demopoulos, *supra* note 12.

142. *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Org.*, 597 U.S. 215, 300 (2022).

143. Lawrence Hurley, *Trump's justices decisive in long campaign to overturn Roe v. Wade*, REUTERS (June 24, 2022), <https://perma.cc/SE7L-C8BT>.

144. *See Dobbs*, 597 U.S. at 332–33 (Thomas, J., concurring).

145. Aneesha Pappy, *Love is (Still) Love: Supreme Court Declines to Hear Kim Davis' Challenge to Constitutional Protections for Marriage Equality*, HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN (Nov. 10, 2025), <https://perma.cc/V5LN-HQWP>.

States v. Skrmetti ruled 6–3 to allow a Tennessee law banning gender-affirming care for transgender people under the age of 18 to remain in effect.¹⁴⁶ Transgender student athlete’s rights are now at stake, as West Virginia and Idaho laws outright banning the participation of transgender athletes in school sports programs are now set to go before the Court in *West Virginia v. B.P.J.* and *Little v. Hecox*, respectively.¹⁴⁷

Just as President Trump has had a hand in empowering others to put their anti-feminist sentiments out in the world, he has hit the ground running in his second term, taking actions that threaten to undo progress for women’s rights. Within weeks of reentering office, Trump signed executive orders declaring that the U.S. recognizes only two genders, male and female; barring transgender people from serving in the military; eliminating funding for gender affirming care; barring transgender women from participating in women’s sports; and eliminating programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”).¹⁴⁸ While many lawsuits have been filed to try and prevent these policies from taking effect, their implementation threatens many people’s access to healthcare, job security, equal pay, and more.

B. RISING ANTIFEMINIST SENTIMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE 4B MOVEMENT

Korea has experienced a similar political situation since 2022, when the now-impeached conservative party member Yoon Suk Yeol was elected president.¹⁴⁹ The media has repeatedly referred to Yoon’s policies as “Trumpism in Korea” due to his far-right policies that reflect similar ideology to what has developed in the U.S.¹⁵⁰ In recent years, the divide between young Korean men and women has grown significantly, and many men resent the women’s movement for prioritizing women’s struggles over their own. Some men have taken things as far as claiming “reverse discrimination,” that women are using the guise of gender inequality to gain an unfair advantage over men in the workplace and push off their household duties.¹⁵¹ During his presidential campaign, Yoon took advantage of the growing divide between the ideological opinions of young male and female voters. Leaning into the primarily young, male base of his political party, Yoon declared that gender discrimination no longer existed in Korea and vowed to abolish the country’s Gender Equality Ministry.¹⁵² His election saw a significant divide in voters by gender, with 59% of men between 18 and 29 voting conservatively, compared to only 34% of women in the same age group.¹⁵³ Yoon ultimately failed to abolish the Ministry before his presidency ended with a chaotic

146. *L.W. v. Skrmetti/U.S. v. Skrmetti*, ACLU (Sept. 26, 2025), <https://perma.cc/SPI7-G3JT>.

147. *West Virginia v. B.P.J.*, ACLU (Jan. 16, 2026), <https://perma.cc/AAV4-Q98X>; *Little v. Hecox*, ACLU (Jan. 16, 2026), <https://perma.cc/9BLV-RELF>.

148. Candice Norwood, *A status update on Trump’s executive orders, from gender to immigration and DEI*, THE 19TH (Feb. 24, 2025), <https://perma.cc/3GLR-VJU7>.

149. Katie Stallard, *South Korea’s Chaos Politics: The president’s impeachment comes amid conspiracy, power grabs and violence in Seoul*, NEW STATESMAN (Feb. 12, 2025) at 30.

150. *Id.* at 32.

151. JUNG, *supra* note 7, at 304.

152. *Id.* at 310.

153. Stallard, *supra* note 149, at 32.

attempt to instill martial law, resulting in his impeachment at the end of 2024.¹⁵⁴ Many of the same women who attended marches during the resurgence of the feminist movement, including at the height of #MeToo, played an integral role in the protests demanding Yoon's removal from office.¹⁵⁵

Women in Korea also face continued concerns over a resurgence of sex crimes, despite progress made through their participation in #MeToo and 4B campaigns. The Burning Sun and Nth Room Scandals, discussed above in Part II.B, were merely the tip of the iceberg in a vast network of sexual abuses against women. These crimes continue to occur, as exemplified by women mass-deleting their social media accounts in 2024, after discovering that men were using images posted on Instagram to create deepfake porn of women, primarily minors.¹⁵⁶ The list of high-profile cases of sexual abuse and assault in Korea goes on and on, showing that the problem is still pervasive in Korean society.

The increase in threats to women's safety and bodily autonomy in both the U.S. and Korea spells out a troubling return to making excuses for abusers and silencing survivors. While #MeToo and 4B have seen broad success in using social media to advocate for women's rights, the digital age of advocacy is a double-edged sword. For every woman who has felt empowered to speak out online, a man also feels empowered to speak out against women's rights and deviation from traditional norms. The stronger women's voices get, the angrier their opponents' responses will be. In this sense, there is concern that the gender wars will only continue to escalate, putting up walls between men and women that make reaching a solution impossible. This is not to say that women should not use social media to organize and protest, only that the framing of women's issues in online spaces must carefully consider its impact and how opposition movements are likely to respond.

VI. CONCLUSION

Feminist movements in the United States and Korea in the past decade have crossed paths and diverged on multiple occasions. As the world enters a digital age where the power to speak your mind and advocate for change is at your fingertips, women are learning to navigate this space in the most effective ways possible to fight for equality. The #MeToo and 4B Movements are just two examples of this phenomenon, highlighting feminists' use of social media to organize against misogyny, and showing how this activism can translate into tangible off-line actions focused on inciting change. Women are learning to come together and lean on one another for support when societal norms cannot change fast enough to keep up with their vision for a brighter future.

Despite these positive advances, it remains unclear what strategies are most effective at achieving the goals of women's rights advocates, if there is even one "best" strategy to begin with. Women are ready to speak out and demand equal

154. *Id.*

155. See generally Faraoun, *supra* note 81.

156. See Kim, *supra* note 4.

treatment, but reality makes it difficult to openly oppose the norm without risking physical, emotional, and financial harm. As a result, some women are taking it upon themselves to quietly make changes in their day-to-day lives which, over time, will dramatically alter the social structure. As different women's movements grow and develop, they learn to adapt and realign themselves with other organizations that have their best interests at heart and pave the way for the most potential progress. For some, this has meant abandoning the traditional means of inciting change through powerful institutions backed by large amounts of funding and political influence. Instead, women are forming movements organically and slowly building support through online platforms and protests in their communities. The careful weighing of different strategies for activism, choosing what is likely to be most effective based on historical and cultural context, has allowed the #MeToo and 4B Movements to make significant progress for women's rights, both through legislation and by challenging ideological norms.

At the same time, these movements face a rising tide of backlash in the form of antifeminist movements. Men who oppose advances in women's rights have also become adept at using social media to their advantage and have amassed large followings of young men whose anger towards feminism has transcended national and cultural boundaries and is indicative of what misogynists fear they stand to lose if women gain equal rights. The issue, as many men see it, is not that women are speaking out or quietly taking a step back; it is that they perceive any advance for women as necessitating a lessening of their own rights and power. Rather than simply widening the circle of rights to make room for more people, men are demonizing women for trying to steal portions of the pre-existing pie away from them. These men are bolstered and emboldened by administrations whose political ideologies align with theirs, encouraging more brazen attacks against women and threatening to codify their violent rhetoric in the law. Combatting this perception will require women's movements to contend with deeply ingrained social norms and incrementally change the narrative towards one that recognizes the possibility of equal rights for both parties without requiring the reduction of the rights of one group.

The global presence of movements like #MeToo and 4B signals that women are ready to step up to this challenge; they have not given up and are not done fighting back. If anything, the current political climate and amplifying of antifeminist voices on social media have made women more hungry to stand up against gender-based violence and prevent irreparable damage to the legal and social systems that will harm not only women, but also minority communities such as people of color, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and immigrants. As feminists push forward in a political climate where instability and uncertainty about the future run rampant, it is essential that they learn from the successes and failures of established movements like #MeToo and 4B to ensure that their advocacy is efficient, effective, and inclusive.