The #MeToo Movement: A Solution to an Assurance Problem

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The #MeToo Movement has been characterized as a protest against sexual harassment, a campaign to raise awareness of a widespread social problem, and a legal development in the courts to hold perpetrators accountable. This paper examines the movement as a solution to an assurance problem. Submission to sexual advances in the workplace may appear voluntary, but submission is coerced when the alternative carries detrimental consequences. Given the pattern of irreparable social and financial damage inflicted on women who refuse or speak up against sexual advances, it would be highly risky for one woman to take unilateral action. However, if women collectively choose non-submission, then they would all be better off by distributing the risk among them. The problem was that each woman cannot be assured that others will also choose non-submission. The #MeToo Movement removes the condition of uncertainty and provides assurance that others will also cooperate.

Eun-Jung Katherine Kim is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of LawStart. Professor Kim is a current member of the Humanities Center Advisory Board. Kim’s research is in the theoretical and legal issues related to human rights.